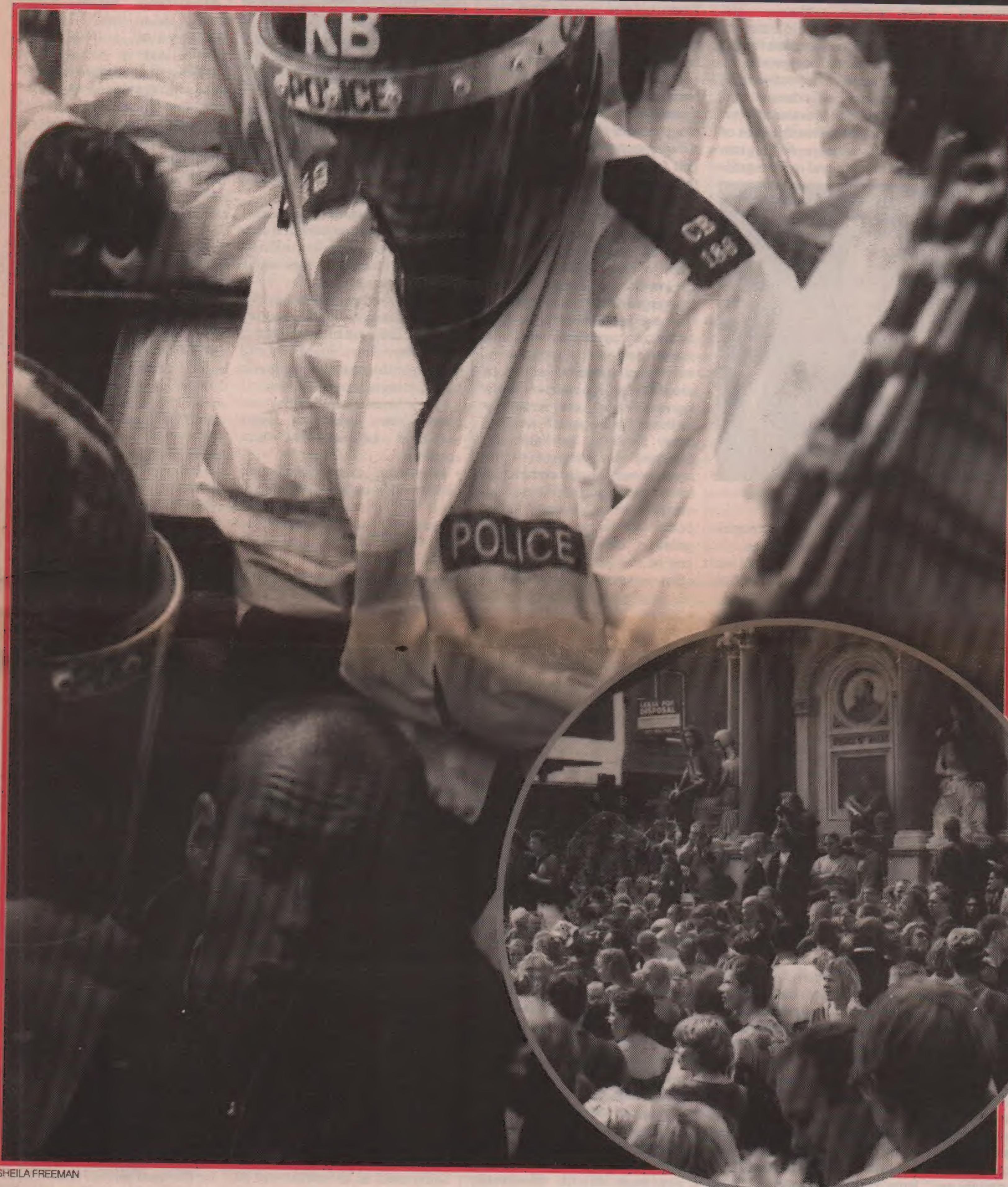


FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 133 October/November 1996

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SHEILA FREEMAN

RECLAIM THE FUTURE

Protestors at Brighton, Newbury, London, and wherever the government is fouling the environment in favour of profits, are coming under attack - and they are fighting back!

ISSN 01435426

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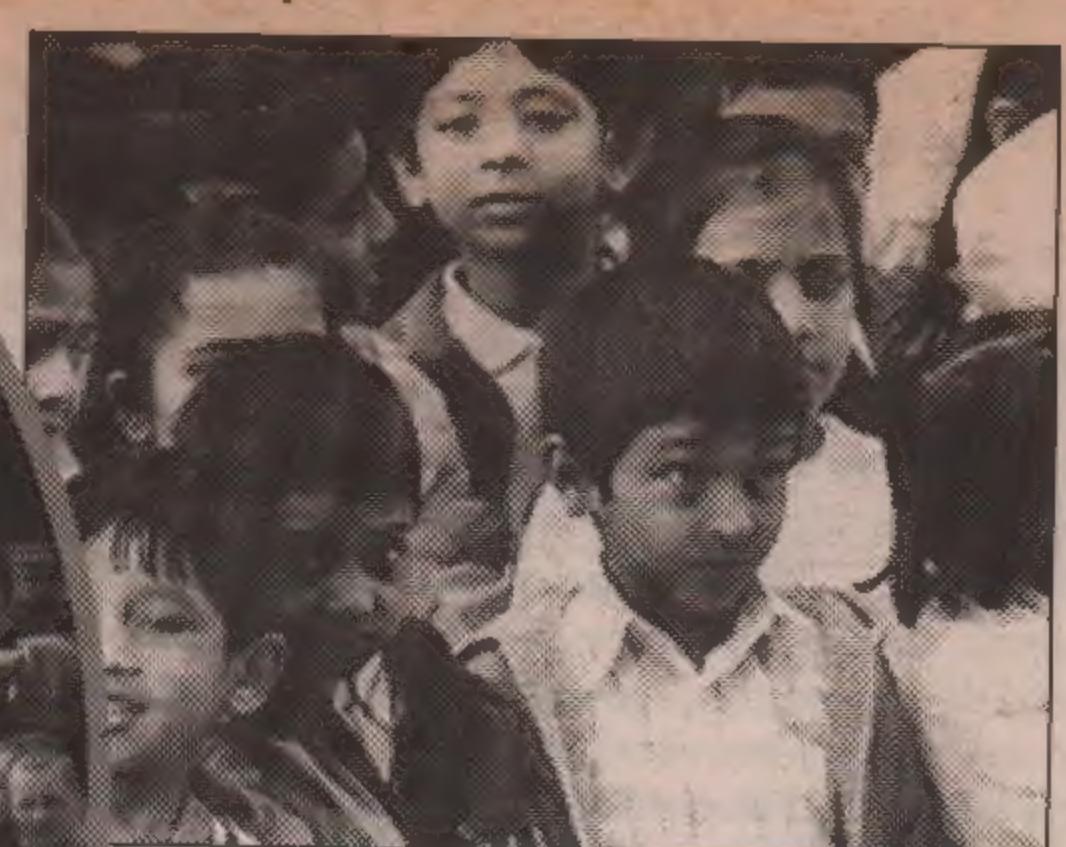
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New Labour, new barbarism

Clinton's wholesale onslaught on state welfare in the US shows us our future under New Labour. To the accompaniment of all the hypocritical phrases beloved by Tony Blair ('tough love', 'replacing welfare with work', 'help out not hand out'), Clinton has condemned millions of people to absolute, starving poverty. Clinton's welfare assault is of course called 'reform' because today barbarism achieves its ends more easily by cloaking itself in the garb of reason. But make no mistake: Blair will tread Clinton's path, and tread it with enthusiasm.

As we approach the turn of the century, everything appears upside down. Repeal or destruction becomes reform, warmongering imperialism becomes peace-keeping, increasing state power becomes safeguarding liberty. Chile's 'experiment' in free market liberalism during the late 1970s and 1980s became a by-word for barbarism as the whole state welfare system set up by the Allende government was privatised and destroyed. But now what do we see? None other than New Labour's expert on welfare, Frank Field, junketing off to Santiago to look at Chile's privatised pensions system and coming back favourably impressed! The fact that the necessary conditions for setting up this system - which provides nothing for the Chilean working class - was the bloody coup of 1973 is now a matter of apparently negligible importance.

Many on the left still hope that New Labour may offer something, however tiny, to the working class - something that can let them vote for Blair whilst still holding onto a clear conscience. But forget the nice, happy-face images: New Labour is a ruthless, totalitarian party dedicated unconditionally to the preservation of privilege, oppression and exploitation.

New Labour intends to destroy state welfare as we know it. The political and economic pressures on Clinton will be even greater on a Blair-led government because British imperialism is even weaker. There is a difference, however: Clinton dissembled and lied. Blair does not bother. There is no working class movement for him or New Labour to be concerned about. Hence their absolute contempt for the TUC - first in the suggestion that

there be further restriction on trade union rights in the public sector, then that, following a victory at the general election, the links between Labour and the unions would be finally broken, and lastly in the suggestion that socialism be 'humanely phased out'.

New Labour will take over government at a time when there are restrictions on citizens unprecedented in peacetime. It

has been tackled'. Furthermore, 'I see the criminal justice system - especially the youth justice system - still trapped in a secret garden, in which a culture of excuse for the performance of the system, its delays, waste, ineffectiveness, and for the offenders themselves, is too prevalent.' New Labour will brutalise the lives of the poor even more. All they can expect is more and more regulation.



Preparing for power: reaction masked as reason

is going to keep them all. It is even going to add to them. It will therefore become the most repressive government in modern times. It will not repeal the Jobseeker's Allowance. It will not return the right to silence for those on criminal charges. It will not introduce any curbs on MI5. It will not repeal any of the trade union laws. It will do nothing to stop the destruction of the environment. It will allow employers to see employees' criminal records. It will not reduce the two-year qualification period to get basic employment rights. It does not oppose ID cards. But it does favour curfews for children, bans on public drinking, and criminal punishments for noisy neighbours on council estates. It also favours snooping on neighbours and shopping them for so-called benefit fraud.

Listen to what they say, read what they write. 'Flexible labour markets are an important and permanent feature in raising efficiency and ultimately living standards' says Tony Blair in opposing any improvement in trade union rights. That was what they said in Chile after the coup. There the attack on welfare was made possible by a regime of naked terror. In the US, it has been preceded by an explosion in the gaol population with 1.6 million people locked up, more black people inside than in further education, and the richest state California spending more on jails than on education as a whole. A new barbarism indeed.

It will be no different here. New Labour is preparing a regime where the police will have unlimited rights to deal with young people. Jack Straw is now arguing against penal reformers that he is impatient with the 'moral relativist brigade who argue that there is little point doing anything much about young offenders from deprived areas...until the underlying cause of their depriva-

tion, more and more compulsion, fewer and fewer rights.

New Labour leaders are no fools. If they are to cut the £90 billion state welfare bill to shreds - and that will be the central purpose of any government they form - they must have the apparatus available to crush any revolt. Even if in the past it had at times to take note of working class opinion, that is no longer the case. There is no socialist working class movement nationally and, internationally, the communist movement has been severely set back. New Labour can openly represent the interests of capital without using the language of socialism. It can make a naked appeal to the greed and self-interest of today's middle class and know that there is no countervailing pressure from the working class.

In these circumstances, the politics of New Labour have become a form of populist totalitarianism. As Larry Elliot puts it in the *Guardian*, having decided that it will not regulate the markets ('the role of governments is not to command but to facilitate' - Blair) New Labour 'will regulate the people instead, imposing a panoply of social controls to ensure that the problems caused by uncontrollable unregulated economy - crime, juvenile delinquency, family breakdown - don't threaten the comfortable lifestyles of its new middle class constituency.'

Blair has written that 'the breakdown of family and community bonds is intimately linked to the breakdown in law and order. Both family and community rely on notions of mutual respect and duty'. Adding that 'the values of a decent society are in many ways the value of the family unit, which is why helping to re-establish good family and community life should be a central object of government policy', he expresses the kind of sentiments with which dictators such as

Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore or, dare one say, Pinochet of Chile would be quite at home with. When he also argues that 'we accept our duty as a society to give each person a stake in its future. And in return each person accepts responsibility to respond, to work to improve themselves', we remember a slogan from an earlier era - *Arbeit macht frei* ('work makes you free'), a phrase coined by the Nazis.

In our last issue we spoke of New Labour's manifesto as the road to social fascism. The concept of social fascism dates back to early 1930s, when the communist movement of the time argued that social democracy and fascism were the twin pillars of capitalism, and that social democracy in government was prepared either to use military force to crush working class revolt or to surrender to those forces which would open fascism. In Italy and Germany the strength of the revolutionary and communist forces within the working class meant that social democracy could not carry out the programme capitalism required, and so the naked terror of fascism was necessary to destroy all resistance. Today, in the absence of any working class movement, let alone communism, New Labour has a free hand to establish the sort of dictatorship of capital that is a precondition to salvaging British imperialism's fortunes. New Labour's regime will be one of increasing regulation, compulsion and repression of the working class and poor. No one with a shred of humanity can offer them any sort of support.

ROBERT CLOUGH

'Clinton cancels Roosevelt' was the headline in an Italian newspaper in August as President Clinton effectively abolished the US state welfare system set up by President Roosevelt in the 1930s. Under the terms of what was then called the New Deal, Roosevelt had ordered that national government rather than the individual states should be responsible for welfare. Now Clinton has reversed that and ordered savage cuts:

- A family will lose all benefits if the head of the household is out of work continuously for more than two years
- No one can spend more than a total of five years on benefit during the course of their working life. More than five years, and they get nothing.
- Unemployed people can only get three months' food stamps between the ages of 18 and 50. Once they have used those three months, they are banned from getting any more for life.
- Single mothers under 18 can only receive benefit if they remain at school and live with an adult.

• Legal immigrants cannot receive benefit or food stamps at all if they are not yet US citizens, even if they lived in and paid taxes in the US for decades.

The bill cuts 300,000 disabled children from welfare rolls, and will immediately throw 1.1 mil-



NHS faces cash crisis

The NHS is facing its worst cash crisis for a decade. Many of London's Health Authorities, which purchase health care in the internal market are facing bankruptcy. East London and City Health Authority is £12 million in the red, and faces a deficit next year of £20 million. Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham are £18 to £27 million in debt, Camden and Islington £8 million. Merton, Southwark and Wandsworth are proposing not to buy any more non-life threatening elective surgery to cope with their £14 million deficit.

Health Authorities with the worst problems are in the inner city areas, where the funding formula does not take into account concentrations of the poor, the homeless, refugees, single parent families and black people. On top of this are the extra demands of caring for mentally ill offenders. As it is, the increase in funding of 1 per cent this year in no way meets the 5 per cent rise in services needed. The shortfall is also being used as an excuse not to meet nurses' pay claim. Only 1 in 10 NHS Trusts have settled in

local pay negotiations, whilst 60 per cent have yet to make a formal offer beyond the national basic increase of 1.75 per cent. This means that nurses are facing the prospect of a wage cut.

The government is already talking of the need for the NHS to make 'difficult choices'. But given that this is Tony Blair's and New Labour's mantra, and that they may be in government when the crisis peaks, we may expect them to be responsible for the most serious cuts in NHS provision since its inception.

Robert Clough

No deportations

ADAM SHERWOOD

At 2pm on 25 September, Prakash Chavrimootoo went to a Birmingham police station to sign on pending an appeal against her deportation. She was then arrested, separated from her son, Prem, and taken to Campsfield detention centre. That night, a picket of the police station was held and next day Campsfield was picketed. Prakash had been harassed by police for some time. One clerk

had twice tried to falsify dates and times of her weekly signatures in order to claim that she had defaulted on conditions.

Prakash came to England in 1989, having married a British citizen. Within months Prakash suffered domestic violence and was forced to leave.

Prakash was then told she would be deported as her marriage had lasted less than 12 months. This rule is both racist and sexist - forcing women to

stay in violent marriages. Prakash's campaign will picket for her right to stay at the High Court on 2 October.

Also in Birmingham, Audrey Grant is fighting her deportation to Jamaica. Audrey had been snatched while signing on at the police station. Campaigning secured her release and there will be a picket of her hearing at the High Court in London on 14 November.

Details: the West Midlands Anti-Deportation Campaign, 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B18 1NH. Tel: 0121 507 1618.

COMMUNIST FORUMS

LONDON
Sunday 20 October 2.30pm
The poisonous roots of racism
Speaker: Maxine Williams
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
WC1 (Holborn tube) £1/50p

MANCHESTER
Wednesday 16 October 7.30pm
Labour's manifesto:
the road to social fascism
Friends Meeting House, Mount St

Write to FRFI, BCM Box 5909,
London WC1N 3XX or tel:
0171 837 1688 for further details

IRELAND

Shoot-to-kill comes to London

SARAH BOND



In the early hours of 23 September, British police gunned down 27-year-old Diarmuid O'Neill in his home in west London. In the same operation, in several locations, they arrested five other people and uncovered explosives and bomb-making equipment in north London. One of those arrested was Diarmuid O'Neill's brother Shane, who was subsequently released without charge on police bail.

The truth of the killing will no doubt emerge only slowly from the lies and half-truths put out by the police and security forces and faithfully disseminated by the press. The pattern of events is reminiscent of that around the murder of three IRA volunteers in Gibraltar in 1988. But whether this was a planned shoot-to-kill operation or not, there is an important difference to Gibraltar. This killing was by British police, not Army, officers and it took place in a London street. It marks an arrogant and confident escalation of state power which democratic and progressive forces in Britain ignore at their peril.

Kurdish prisoners in British gaols

NICKI JAMESON

On 25 July 1996 the Court of Appeal gave its judgement in the case of three Kurdish prisoners: Cafer Kovaycin, Hikmet Bozat and Servet Ozen. All three were convicted in 1994 on two charges: one of 'conspiring to commit arson with intent to endanger life'; the other of committing arson, in specific attacks against Turkish banks.

Servet Ozen's family has supported him throughout and had collected 5,500 petition signatures in support of his appeal. Although the judges dismissed this as having 'political undertones', there is no doubt that they were influenced by the number of references, school reports and letters of support. Servet is now 21 and, having spent the past two years in a Young Offenders' Institution, is about to be moved to an adult male prison. He will be eligible for parole in 1998.

At the 'leave to appeal' hearing in February 1996, the court rejected the men's applications to appeal against their convictions but agreed they could appeal against length of sentence and the recommendation that they be deported.

The court ruled that it was wrong for the conspiracy sentences to be longer than those for the specific offences and reduced the 15 year sentences to 12 years and Servet's 12 to 10. It further conceded that Servet's sentence was still too long and reduced it to eight years. Then came the ruling on the deportation recommendations.

The Appeal Court judges agreed with the submission that the trial judge was wrong to make a recommendation for deportation while failing to give

bility, indeed the probability, of grave loss of life...'

Details of the shooting of Diarmuid O'Neill in early reports were sketchy but gave the clear impression that he had been armed. Mention was made of a 'gunfight' and 'exchange of fire'. The *Daily Telegraph* conceded the day after the shooting that 'It is believed that no shots were fired at police', but went on to say that 'witnesses heard officers warning someone to drop a gun'. A security guard at Charing Cross Hospital, where O'Neill's body was taken, said that 'one of the medical staff described him as being like a pin cushion because he had been hit so many times'. Surely then the police must have been under threat themselves?

But just three days later, this story was beginning to unravel. Not only were no shots fired at the police but *The Guardian* confirmed that O'Neill was unarmed. The police, it was reported, had believed that their lives were under threat after he had made 'a threatening movement'. They had then shot him six times. Echoes again of Gibraltar, where 'Soldier A' who shot Mairead Farrell claimed he had done so after

she made 'an aggressive movement'.

Again as with the Gibraltar killings, the shooting of Diarmuid O'Neill followed a long and detailed surveillance operation, involving the RUC, MI5 and Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist branch. Further details of this operation have yet to emerge, and it even remains to be seen whether O'Neill was an IRA volunteer at all.

There has been no condemnation of the shooting from any British politician. Tony Blair has concentrated instead on threatening Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn with expulsion for proposing to meet Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams in the House of Commons. Never mind that Gerry Adams was a Member of the Commons for ten years, elected by the people of West Belfast. Who is ignoring the democratic process there, Mr Blair? But then our rulers, whether Tory or Labour, have a selective approach to democracy and it has always been in particularly short supply in relation to Ireland.

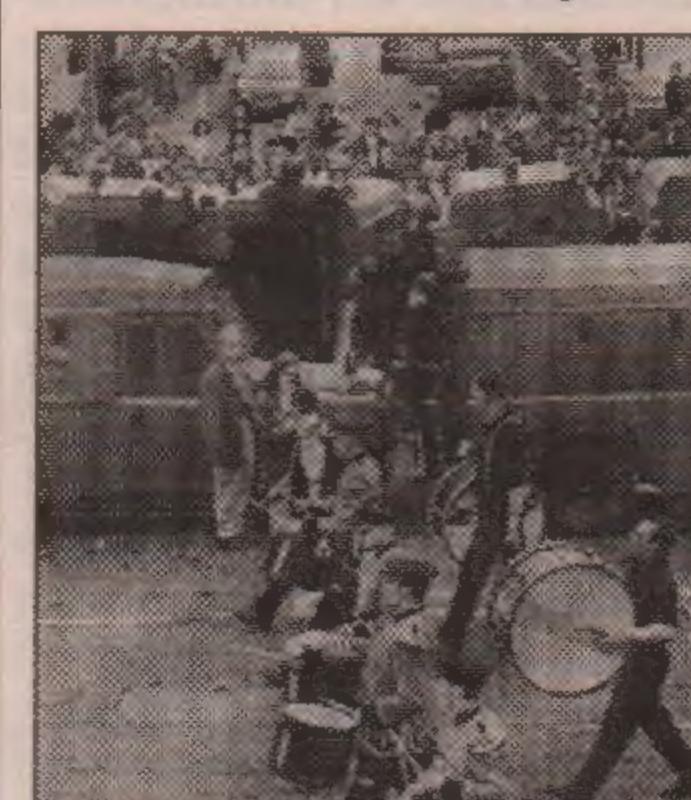
If the police and politicians are able to cover-up the shooting of Diarmuid O'Neill, the democratic rights of all those regarded as enemies of the state – striking workers, black people who organise against racist attacks, environmental campaigners – will have suffered a devastating blow. As the Police Complaints Authority launches its inquiry and the long inquest process begins, the demand must be raised: No cover up! Armed police off our streets!

Nationalists under attack

MIKE PEARSE

Recent events in the Six Counties continue to highlight the sectarian nature of the RUC and the statelet it defends.

The Derry-based human rights group, the Pat Finucane Centre, has produced a report on the street fighting in Derry on 11, 12 and 13 July which erupted in the aftermath of the 'Siege of Drumcree'. According to the report, the RUC initiated the events which left 332 people injured by plastic bullets, many seriously. A civilian worker at the RUC's Derry headquarters



reported that a senior officer described the notorious DMSU squads as 'out for trouble' and 'raring to go'. Plastic bullets were fired in such high numbers that the guns were overheating and jamming.

Since then, attacks on Nationalists have continued. Martin Toner lost the sight of one eye when shot in the face at close range by the RUC in County Armagh. A total of 50 plastic bullets were fired at Nationalists after the RUC directed a busload of Loyalist bands into a predominantly nationalist town. Toner was standing in the grounds of the Catholic church when he was hit. Martin Connolly remains on a life support machine after being hit by an RUC Landrover and shot by a plastic bullet.

In an attempt to put some non-sectarian gloss on its image, the RUC has suspended a sergeant and three constables for participating in a loyalist parade. All are members of the Royal Black Preceptory.

Meanwhile, British agent Brian Nelson has been released from gaol after serving six years of his ten-year sentence for conspiracy to murder. With the help of British intelligence, Nelson supplied information to loyalist killers on Republicans. He was implicated in the murder of progressive lawyer Pat Finucane. He was also centrally involved in the shipment of weapons from South Africa to loyalist death squads. At his trial, a British army officer described Nelson as a hero. Within months of conviction, he was transferred from the north of Ireland to a British prison. Compare his treatment with that of Patrick Kelly, ill with cancer, and only repatriated after sustained protest.

While such sectarianism prevails, it is little wonder that Sinn Fein does not accept the unconditional surrender that is required for them to enter talks. There can be no peace in Ireland until British troops leave, until the Six Counties statelet is dismantled and a united Ireland is achieved.

What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit – that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people – women in particular – trapped in low wage part-time jobs. 25% of the population – the majority women and children – live in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. *The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.*

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. *The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.*

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the Criminal Justice Act have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. *The RCG opposes the Criminal Justice Act and fights to defend democratic rights – the right to organise and protest.*

► The richest 20% of the world's population consumes 83% of its wealth and resources. It is the capitalist system which consigns billions to poverty. Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious – low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. *The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.*

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. *We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.*

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. *The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.*

► Who will defend the interests of the working class? In Britain, it is clear the Tories defend only the rich and corrupt – but the Labour Party won't defend the working class either. It wants middle class votes in the next election – and has approved many anti-working class laws, including the Criminal Justice Act. The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. *The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.*

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. *We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.*

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally.

The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 0171 837 1688

News

Smash the JSA!

DAVID HOWARTH

The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) is set to come into operation throughout the country on 7 October 1996, with an estimated 215,000 unemployed people facing disqualification from benefits in the first year of its implementation. Despite the suggestion by many apologists for the 'Labour Movement' that the only way to defeat the JSA would be through the trade unions, they haven't stopped, or even managed to slightly delay, this vicious attack on state welfare benefits. However, resistance is growing, especially where the JSA pilot schemes are already under way. This resistance is mainly led by local groups united around Groundswell to exchange information on Benefit Agency (BA)/Employment Service (ES) tactics and share effective and imaginative tactics of resistance.

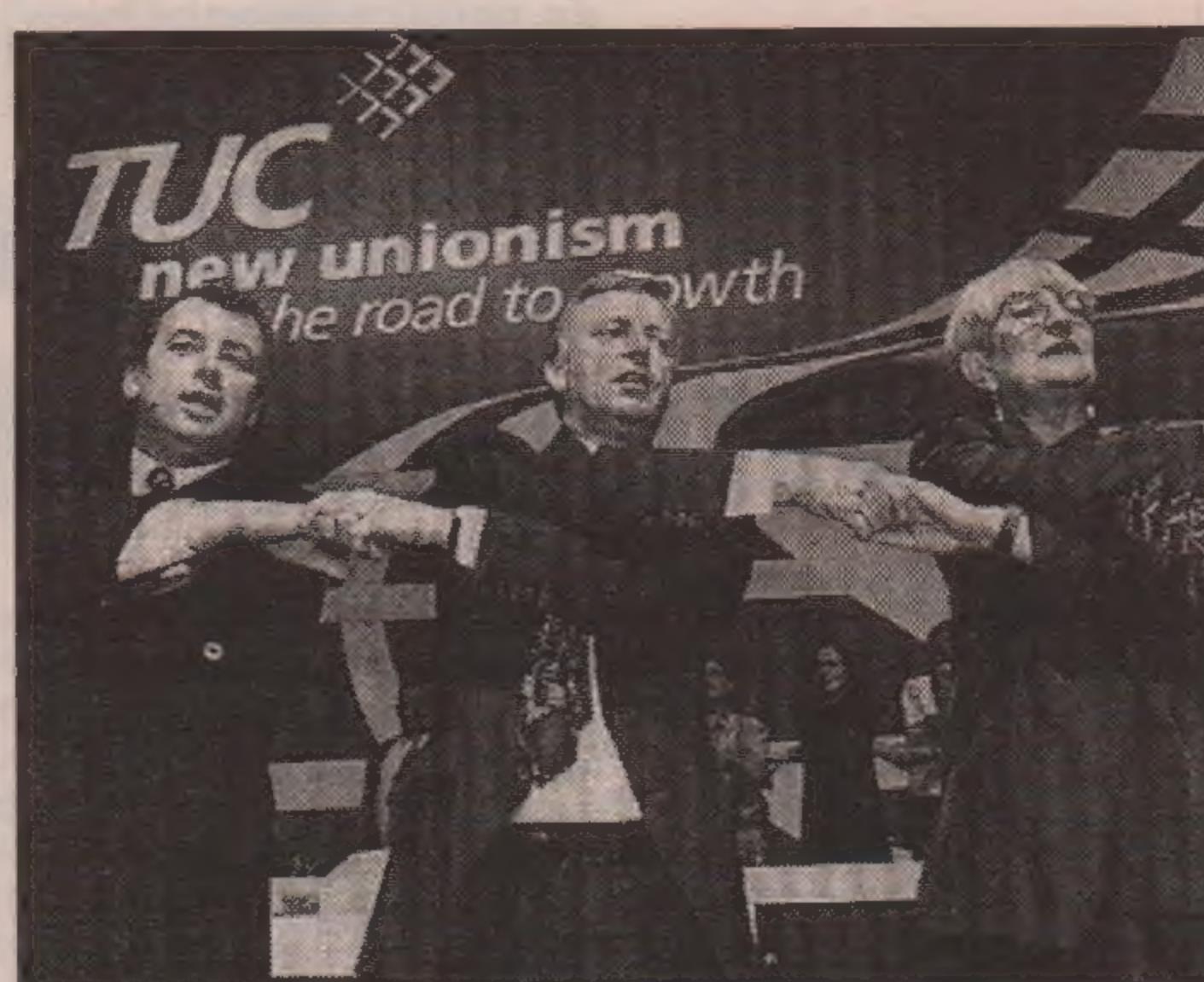
Inspired by Edinburgh Claimants, Groundswell has adopted the 'three strikes and you're out' policy, which is aimed at overzealous BA/ES staff who use the JSA to harass claimants. The policy operates as follows:

- If a BA/ES official is guilty of harassing a claimant, the local anti-JSA group will issue a written warning to the official. Strike one!
- If a second complaint against the same individual is received, this will result in a second and final written warning. Strike two!
- Any further complaints against that official will lead to details of their offences along with a photograph of them being made into posters to be widely distributed and followed by demonstrations against them at their offices. Strike three and out!

Both Tories and Labour are

the three strikes campaign is an invitation to physical assault' and demands protection from management. And the Leeds ES management has responded by issuing a circular to staff which states that the police will be called in to deal with any 'harassment' and will be encouraged to prosecute the claimants. 'If the police do not want to prosecute' the ES themselves will take the claimant to court. The CPSA has to decide whose side it is on and its actions so far show it to be on the side of the state: firstly striking for screens to be erected in BA/ES offices; now using management and state forces against the claimants. All Groundswell information clearly states that it is preferable to work in conjunction with dole workers, but if they don't put up a real struggle, the fight goes forward without them.

Groundswell organised actions against JSA Implementation Managers (JIMs), protesting at and occupying their offices, fly-posting photographs and details of the JIMs, stating: 'If they don't like such personal attention they should reflect on the very personal consequences of their job for thousands of people. We advise them to consider a new occupation.' Local groups continue to picket BA/ES offices and distribute information about the JSA and its consequences and there is a lot of co-operation between local groups in organising events and activities. An information pack can be obtained from Groundswell which includes a guide to getting an anti-JSA group started, a claimants' survival guide, a guide to dealing with Benefits Fraud Investigators, and example leaflets, as well as a list of local groups (see address below).



TUC '96 'New unionism – the road to growth'

BOB SHEPHERD

This was the campaigning slogan of this year's TUC. What did it mean? To all intents and purposes New Unionism doesn't seem to be much different to the 'old unionism' of recent years – an alliance between the TUC and the Labour Party.

Before the conference had even started, the general council was attempting to get the motion calling for a minimum wage of £4.26 per hour off the agenda. 'The road to growth', it seems, is a minimum wage set by a Labour government in consultation with the employers and the Low Pay Commission!

The motion calling for £4.26 an hour, moved by the representative of 'old unionism', Arthur Scargill of the SLP, NUM, and seconded by UNISON, was eventually passed by conference. At the same time they passed the general council statement calling for a minimum wage to be set by an incoming Labour government in consultation with the employers and the low pay commission. It is this policy which is in reality now the position of the TUC, to back whatever formula for the minimum wage a Labour government comes up with. The TUC's new unionism is support for 'new Labour'.

As with the previous few conferences of 'old unionism', this year's conference of New Unionism rejected calls to defy anti-trade union laws. Instead it passed a motion calling on an incoming Labour government to introduce a package of positive rights for trade unions. Positive

rights presumably as put forward by Peter Hain and David Blunkett, representatives of New Labour, who called for binding arbitration in the public sector and the forcing of unions to hold a ballot whenever employers put forward a 'significant' new offer in an industrial dispute.

The whole conference was overshadowed by the relationship between the TUC and New Labour. Tony Blair and New Labour showed their contempt for New Unionism during the week of conference, using it as a means of showing the middle class how little influence even New Unionism has on New Labour policies.

The cat was finally let out of the bag by New Labour unemployment spokesman Stephen Byers when, in a cosy chat with four journalists, he said that New Labour was planning to ballot its membership on breaking the link with the trade union movement. As Tony Blair put it, when speaking to business leaders in London, 'the trade union relationship is being cast for the modern day'.

The 'new' Labour Party is preparing for government. It is a party of and for the middle class and has got rid of any notions of representing the interests of the working class. The 'old' Labour of Clause IV has been ditched. This is what New Unionism stands for: an alliance with New Labour and a dumping of the class rhetoric of the 'old unionism' of Scargill and the NUM.

New Unionism + New Labour = an alliance to attack working class living standards. ■

Liverpool dockers' strike: one year on

ROBERT CLOUGH

Up to 10,000 people took part in a demonstration on 28 September through Liverpool in support of the 500 dockers who have been on strike for a year. Apart from local trade unionists, there was a contingent of Hillingdon women, hospital cleaners who have been on strike for a year. There was also substantial support from various environmental groups including Reclaim the Streets, who were also participating in an action on 30 September.

The roots of the strike lie in the end of the National Dock Labour Scheme in 1989. Coupled with the privatisation of the docks, it was bound to mean that at some stage casualisation would be reintroduced. In September 1995 Torside Limited, who employed some 80 dockers, took the first step. All 80 dockers went on strike and set up pickets which the remaining 500 dockers refused to cross. They were sacked. Since then, they have been fighting for reinstatement. The port is now being run by scabs provided by a variety of agencies. The scabs work as casual labourers: they have no mini-

mum fixed hours of work, no pension rights, no paid holidays, no sick pay.

Merseyside Dock and Harbour Company have offered the strikers a £25,000 pay-off and suggested there might be some 40 to 60 jobs available in one part of the docks. These offers have been rejected out of hand. The workers have obtained massive international support from dockers in the US, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and elsewhere in Europe. However, the strike remains unofficial, as it has always done, with the TUC leadership trying to pressure the dockers into the earliest possible settlement. At a rally after the march Jim Nolan, one of the strikers' leaders, warned New Labour that the strike was a shot across their bows. The fact is, of course, that New Labour's globalised labour market is nothing more than the globalisation of casualised working. Hence whenever New Labour representatives talk about the Liverpool dockers it is only to attack them. The fact is that the strikers have taken a stand against conditions which were the norm in docklands 100 years ago, and socialists must support them. Victory to the Liverpool dockers! ■



Pensioners notes

RENE WALLER

I started writing these notes some time ago, but could not finish them until our national demonstration and march to Trafalgar Square had taken place. Always one wonders: 'Is our movement still solid?' We have inevitably had losses, but the need to fight back is still there and the best way to show our gratitude for their efforts is to carry forward their work.

These last few weeks we've all been busy with preparations, publicising first the date of our

proposed march and then putting forward our views and demands and clarifying them, urging all our supporters to come and, in many cases, booking coaches to ensure that all who wanted, including disabled members and supporters, could be there.

We didn't however just want a big turnout, but a lot of determined people who know what they want and believe it is not only possible to achieve success but is the only way to survive at all. From those seeking our votes at the coming general election, we need a definite

commitment to restore the link between the amount of our basic pension and the cost of living, and we want it done now – time certainly isn't on our side. Well, we got the turnout we needed and I think our enemies as well as our friends can be in little doubt of either our determination nor our aims. Let's keep the pressure up.

Most of us are now looking to indoor meetings and rallies to consolidate the support we've won. Let's not forget we can do anything if we stay together and fight back when attacked. All we need to do is mobilise properly and insist that no so-called leaders are allowed to change our demands or ignore our wishes. ■

As the CPSA and PTC civil service unions claim to be opposed to the JSA and on the side of the claimants, they should have nothing to fear from this campaign. If they don't harass claimants, they don't receive any warning letters. However the CPSA, including the Militant Labour-led Left Unity faction, opposes the three Strikes policy. Militant's stance is hardly surprising given their close collaboration with the police after the Trafalgar Square Poll Tax riot. In a letter to local CPSA members, Leeds Regional CPSA secretary Frank Bonner, further widens the division between dole workers and claimants by maintaining that

In briefs

So that's why priests are called Father

Oh, dear. Hardly a day goes by now without further revelations about the rather less than celibate state enjoyed by many priests. They have affairs, beget children, molest choristers and juvenile parishioners and give a whole new meaning to the term 'religious affairs'. And these are the chaps who have ruined generations of women's lives by forbidding the use of contraception.

By their friends...

Labour MP, Kim Howells has called for the Party to officially stop using the term 'socialism'. It should, he said, be 'humanely phased out'. Some, who know Howells' background, think that he should be 'phased out' - and not that humanely. Howells, an ex-Communist Party member became an NUM official in Wales (having qualified for this post by his activities at Hornsey Art College) in the 1980s. During the '84-'85 strike he played, along with Kinnock and Eurocommunists in the CP, a prominent role in denouncing Scargill and encouraging the back-to-work movement. He helped write Kinnock's anti-Scargill speech to the Labour Party conference and later repeatedly called for a police inquiry into the allegations of embezzlement, now shown to be instigated by MI5, against Scargill. He topped this only by his crass support for Robert Maxwell, even after the latter's death, and by his post as president of Labour Friends of Israel.

An interesting career to say the least, and clearly one whose aim has always been the 'phasing out of socialism'.

CS gas 'safe' - like beef and radiation

CS gas has been officially approved for use by all police forces. It has already been used 582 times. At least five people have been hospitalised and one, Ibrahima Sey, has died. Home Secretary Michael Howard has said it is 'safe and effective' despite the fact that the long-term effects of exposure to it are unknown and the immediate effects on the very young, old or sick are potentially lethal. Nevertheless, it was used on a mother and child to overcome the mother's resistance to having her child removed by social services.

Meanwhile, beef has also become very 'safe', and even exposure to low level radiation is said by one of Britain's nuclear industry bosses to be positively healthy. Yep. And war is peace-making, exploitation is wealth creation and so on...

Higher education?

Boring Melanie Phillips has now written about her favourite hobby-horse - the decline of educational standards in Britain. This she very daringly ascribes to 'progressive' teaching methods, lack of factual information being imparted, blah blah blah. The usual stuff. The only interesting thing about her book launch was that the RCP's *Living Marxism* education correspondent was vocal in his praise of her thesis. Apparently they too are worried about the nonsensical notion of egalitarianism in education ('giving prizes to everyone') and keen to defend 'academic excellence'. Strange that these boids should be worried about giving prizes to everyone when only just over 30% of 18-year-olds are still in education. But not so strange that the RCP should take this line. Most of them are so very highly educated that the miners had to chase them out of the pit areas during the 1984-'85 strike when they came demanding that the striking miners hold a strike ballot.

Education notes

SUSAN DAVIDSON

Education and poverty: Britain 1996

The idea that a national curriculum means all children have the same experience at school because they are studying the same programmes is insulting and cruel to the growing number of families being pushed into poverty. Not only are unemployment and homelessness growing, but the provision of state welfare is being whittled away from working-class young people, making it increasingly difficult for them to do well at school.

Child Benefit at risk

A recent report by the Child Poverty Action Group states that Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown's proposals to remove child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education risks 'pushing additional families into poverty'. Child Benefit would continue for households on family credit levels but the 1.1 million families with incomes of under £200 a week would lose £591 a year for each child and be pushed below the official poverty level. The Labour Party has proposed financing its youth training schemes with money saved from child benefit. What a disgrace to propose that basic education services are financed from the family incomes of the poor.

Free milk under threat

When it cannot take from the poor, the British ruling class is manoeuvring not to give to the



poor. Last year the School Milk Campaign, a national charity run by parents produced a survey. It shows that a fifth of local education authorities are charging for milk for four-year-olds in nursery schools. Northern Ireland is the area with the highest number of authorities charging for the one third of a pint a day that children are entitled to under the 1988 Welfare Food Regulations. As the survey says, 'it's an absolute scandal that parents are being charged in one of the poorest areas in Northern Europe'. Other areas such as Hertfordshire do not charge for the milk, but each parent pays £5 a year for the 'administration and distribution costs' of milk to the under-fives. The Department of Health has responded to the survey by saying that it 'cannot afford to publicise the fact that the milk should be free or to monitor whether nursery classes are providing it'. It has also said that the increase in the number

of self-governing local management schools make it difficult for them to know what is going on.

No more school health service

It is this same Department of Health which has been challenged recently on whether or not there is a legal requirement for a school health service. There is not. A representative of the department said on 5 September that 'parents can no longer expect their children to have a health check at school'. That needs stating again quite clearly: the British school system does not provide for routine health checks for any child from the age of four years whether it be for inoculations, feet, dental health, monitoring of growth, sight, hearing, physical ability or any other aspect of health care.

No care for children in care

We have recently learned with

horror about the systematic abuse of children in care and the orchestrated attempts to cover it up. There is no national monitoring of care provision but some recent investigations* have shown that children in foster and residential care are the most seriously educationally disadvantaged of any group of young people. In particular, they are the least prepared for the transition to life after school. In one local authority over half of 16-year-olds had not been entered for any GCSE exams, 35% had not had a careers interview, over 50% had not done work experience and 56% had no National Record of Achievement. Up to 80% of young people who had been in care in this same area are currently unemployed.

Youngsters in care are among the most needy and vulnerable children in Britain, yet they are often forced to make the move from being 'looked after' to looking after themselves with little or no preparation or support. The government expects parents to support their children under the age of 25 years whether they are in education, training or unemployed. Yet most local authorities will refuse to give grants to young people over 21 years who had previously been in their care and who want to try to catch up with the education they missed or go on a training course.

£20,000 - the cost of a university degree?

Proposals to scrap the maintenance grant and introduce private tuition fees were top of the agenda in September when the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), which

represents all 115 British universities, met in Sheffield to discuss the future of funding. They are waiting for the detailed report from Sir Ron Dearing's inquiry into higher education, but universities are already sure that the government is not going to provide the funds needed (nor is Labour proposing anything different).

The proposal is to scrap the current Student Loans Scheme and replace it with income contingent loans through which graduates in employment would contribute to the cost of their maintenance and tuition over the whole course of their working life, instead of just five years as at present. This is one way of dealing with the scandal of student poverty because the maximum loan for maintenance would be increased to £4,475 a year. Graduates would have 20 years to repay the loans. However, these could total more than £20,000 by the time they graduate - more for doctors and those taking a postgraduate education course to become teachers.

There are very few working class students who would be prepared to take on this burden of debt at the start of their working lives. In addition, the implication that a country as wealthy as Britain cannot afford to provide a decent higher education, or, rather, that it does not wish to afford it, is a disgrace. Up till now there has been no sign of a fight back from the National Union of Students but protest is being organised. ■

* *Too much too young: the failure of social policy in meeting the needs of care leavers*, Frances Meegan and others, report by the Action on Aftercare Consortium.

Government twists and turns on BSE

GREG SCOTT

It took nearly ten years for the British government to admit its 'big lie' - that BSE could not be transmitted to humans. Its final admission that people are dying horribly of CJD as a result, had enormous economic consequences, and these are the only ones that hurt them. The government, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and the vastly powerful beef and livestock industry are entirely to blame. Their first response to exposure was to try to wriggle out of the EU ban on beef exports, and they are still wriggling. Having agreed a culling policy, they are now grasping a lifeline thrown to them by scientists. As a result of a scientific paper published in *Nature* on 29 August, the government is now refusing to carry out the selected slaughter programme agreed with the EU in June.

Your interpretation of this 'scientific' paper depends what you think is important. This is clear from media reports on the day of its publication. Early morning news broadcasts reported that the British population has consumed hundreds of thousands

of infected cattle over the last ten years. Later in the day, with spin doctors at work, this 'news' was transformed into a 'natural' end to the BSE epidemic in 2001, regardless of any slaughter policy. You pay your money and take your choice. The government made its choice long ago in favour of profits at the expense of public health.

The scientific paper was written by no less than 15 scientists working at Oxford University, Colorado University, the Central Veterinary Laboratory, and the Institute of Animal Health. They present the pattern of BSE infection and disease in British cattle since 1986 and a computer model that closely reproduces the actual recorded pattern. The model is then used to predict the impact of different culling strategies. This is based on the assumption that since the 1994 ban on infected cattle feed, new cases of BSE will only arise in calves infected by their mothers. This maternal route of infection was denied by the Government even more strongly than the connection between BSE and CJD - another government lie which has fallen by the wayside. New BSE cases have occurred since the ban on using suspect feed.

All the strategies examined by the scientists, including no culling at all, point to the epidemic ending by the year 2001 regardless.

However, the differences between the numbers of BSE cases eliminated by each strategy of targeted cull are enormous. They range from 250 cases, or just four per cent of the expected number, to 6,300, ninety per cent. The optimum strategy, they argue, would be one with the maximum BSE cases eliminated for the minimum number of cattle culled.

'However', they say, 'the practicalities of such an approach, given that roughly 25,500 herds would be affected, need careful consideration.'

This important point has hardly been mentioned, never mind considered. The more new cases of BSE allowed to develop, the more likely it is that infection will pass into the food chain. This is especially true since MAFF is not to be trusted. From the beginning it has put the interests of the industry before the interests of consumers. It is responsible for spot inspections of slaughterhouses to ensure that brains and spinal meat do not enter the food chain. In fact the checks are known to be ineffect-

tive. There have been incidents of MAFF inspectors unable to tell the difference between cow and pig offal.

On top of this, farmers are under pressure because the slaughter policy is underfunded and badly organised. There are many farmers who own cattle that they cannot sell but must feed, and they are becoming quite desperate for income. Many abattoir operators, especially the largest companies, are enjoying a windfall (up to £87, plus the value of the hide per animal) from their contracts with MAFF to destroy cattle more than 30 months old. They have killed about half a million so far, with about another 300,000 to go. In these circumstances it pays to bend the rules: and it is only the rules which stand between the public and infection. What will happen now the cull programme has been called off, no one knows.

Compare the approach being taken by the Switzerland, with the second highest number of reported cases of BSE. The Swiss government announced on 16 September plans to slaughter up to 230,000 cattle, one in eight of its total herd, with the aim of eradicating mad cow disease within three years. Their country has had just 223 confirmed cases of cows with BSE. Britain has had 163,000 confirmed cases, has put an estimated 700,000 other, unconfirmed cases into human consumption, but refuses a targeted cull of just 127,000. The British government clearly sees a serious programme of eradication as sure destruction of the British beef industry. Treasury

finances and itself. They cannot afford to do it, so they are trying to tough it out.

They are taking an enormous risk with people's health. Some have latched on to the lack of other confirmed cases of CJD reported since June as showing that the fears of an epidemic are unfounded. However, the incubation period of CJD is uncertain, but if it is like that in cattle, it could be quite variable and inversely proportional to the amount of infective material eaten. So the 12 cases so far may be of people who ingested unusually large amounts of the infective agent. There may be other yet unknown factors affecting the incubation period. Richard Lacey, professor of microbiology at Leeds University, who made the initial estimate of 500,000 CJD cases, believes there are currently 25 suspected new cases of CJD - an estimate based on contact with relatives.

Professor John Pattison, Chairman of the Government's Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), was asked about the claim that there could be up to half a million cases of CJD in Britain. 'The truth is going to lie somewhere between two more cases and 500,000,' he said. 'We cannot yet exclude the possibility that there will be large numbers. It is frightening.' The time it takes to get results is frustrating. The early investigations into cross-species infectivity took a minimum of two years. It will be at least that again before anything becomes even halfway certain. Meanwhile, we all wait to see if the epidemic in people occurs. ■

Focus on Racism

1996 will be remembered as the year this government introduced its most vicious immigration law to date, consigning the few asylum seekers who make it into Britain to homelessness and destitution while they await decisions on whether they can remain. And while slamming the door in the faces of all would-be immigrants other than the very rich and justifying it with a load of rubbish about 'bogus refugees', the same government continues to spin the outrageous lie that for black people already in Britain all is fair, equal and trouble free. We have Equal Opportunities legislation and a Commission for Racial Equality, so all must be well. NICKI JAMESON reports.

Not for the first time, a report commissioned by the state itself highlights the predominance of inequality, discrimination and racism in Britain today and gives the lie to any notion of a 'colour-blind' or 'classless' society.

Social Focus on Ethnic Minorities (SF) was published in August 1996 by the Office of National Statistics. It contains a wealth of information and data, from a variety of sources, but predominantly from the 1991 Census and the 1995 Labour Force Survey (LFS).

The 1991 Census was the first to include a specific question on ethnic group and this itself is still the cause of contention, not only among those people who object on principle to ethnic monitoring, but also among those 'invisible' populations which are ignored or written out by the monitoring criteria. An Appendix to the SF report contains the telling explanation that 'White' includes not only all those who 'ticked White', but also everyone who 'ticked "Any other ethnic group" and wrote: Irish, Greek, Turkish, other European or Mixed White'. Therefore the two million plus Irish people and people of Irish descent do not feature at all. And, while the situation of the Bangladeshi community in east London, whose numbers are relatively small when assessed on a national basis but who constitute a quarter of the population of Tower Hamlets, is examined, that of the large and concentrated Kurdish and Turkish community in neighbouring Hackney and Haringey is ignored entirely, because they are 'white'.

Furthermore, it is clear that race alone is not responsible for the continued oppression of some ethnic groups. Social class plays an even more important role and largely accounts for the much-vaunted relative 'success' of Indians and Chinese people, as opposed to Afro-Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

According to the LFS (which also ignores those ethnic groups it can classify as 'white'), in Spring 1995 Britain's ethnic minority population was approximately 3.2 million, around 5.7% of the total population. Of these, Indian people were the largest group, followed by those of Pakistani and Black Caribbean origins.

In 1991 a third of the ethnic minority population was under 16, in contrast to a fifth of the white population. Half of all Bangladeshis were under 16 and three-quarters under 35. Around 50% of people from the groups classified by the SF as ethnic minorities were born in Britain, as opposed to having immigrated.

Housing

The report highlights different housing patterns among different ethnic groups who immigrated to Britain in different periods:

'...when immigration was high, distinctive patterns of tenure and quality of housing... In particular the South Asian groups had high levels of owner-occupation, even among those with lower paid jobs... In the early 1980s the proportion of the Black group living in council housing was far higher than among the South Asians and about the same as that for the White population.' [SF p24-5]

Table 1 – Social class, by gender, Spring 1995 (LFS)
(Percentages, except where otherwise stated)

	Professional	Intermediate	Skilled non-manual	Skilled manual	Partly skilled	Unskilled	All (1,000s)
Men							
Black	6	23	13	31	19	8	212
Indian	13	27	15	24	17	–	261
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	–	18	13	35	22	–	149
Other ethnic minorities	14	33	14	26	10	–	174
White	8	29	12	32	14	5	15,484
Women							
Black	–	29	33	11	16	9	243
Indian	6	20	34	7	31	–	194
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	–	20	39	–	31	–	62
Other ethnic minorities	–	31	32	9	18	–	157
White	2	28	37	9	18	7	13,165

Table 2 – Type of dwelling 1994-95 (Percentages, except where otherwise stated)
(Survey of English Housing, Department of the Environment)

	Self-contained					All (1,000s)
	Detached	Semi-detached	Terraced	Flat	Not self-contained	
Black	2	13	33	50	3	369
Indian	13	27	42	15	4	262
Pakistani	7	20	52	17	4	141
Bangladeshi	3	8	35	52	2	63
Other ethnic minorities	13	19	29	33	6	229
White	22	33	28	16	2	18,580

Table 3 – Economic activity status of people of working age, Spring 1995 (LFS)
(Percentages, except where otherwise stated)

	Working full time	Working part time	Unemployed	Inactive	All males (1,000s)
Men					
Black	49	8	21	22	273
Indian	65	7	10	18	306
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	41	8	18	33	216
Other ethnic minorities	51	8	12	29	224
White	72	5	8	15	16,993
Women					
Black	37	15	14	34	296
Indian	36	19	7	38	279
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	12	6	7	75	191
Other ethnic minorities	30	16	8	46	238
White	38	29	5	28	15,420

the most accessible part of the housing market. Over the following years, many of these people were joined in this country by other family members and they therefore needed to find larger accommodation. For many, council housing was not available at this stage because a person had to have been a resident in an area for a certain period of time to qualify. The main option for many immigrants was to buy the cheaper properties on the market.'

'These factors led to the different patterns of tenure and quality of housing... In particular the South Asian groups had high levels of owner-occupation, even among those with lower paid jobs... In the early 1980s the proportion of the Black group living in council housing was far higher than among the South Asians and about the same as that for the White population.' [SF p24-5]



What future for these Bangladeshi children in 'classless' Britain?

28 and 49% overcrowded.

To add insult to injury, while ethnic minority households tend to live in worse conditions than white families, they pay more for their accommodation. All other ethnic groups had higher housing costs than white households, with white families' weekly costs averaging £39, as opposed to £45 for Indian families, £46 for Afro-Caribbeans, £48 for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis and £60 for 'other ethnic minorities'.

Education

The report repeats the much-publicised monitoring of recent GCSE results which revealed that the percentage of entrants achieving five or more A-C grades was highest among 'other Asians' (which includes Chinese people and probably some African Asians) followed by Indian and then by white students. But it emphasises the importance of social class when assessing these figures:

'Many factors can affect educational achievements. Family background, in particular... children whose fathers are in the manual social classes tend to have lower achievements, which may account for the low proportions of Black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi children achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A to C.'

Shortly after the publication of the Social Focus report, Ofsted, the schools inspectorate, published *Recent Research in the Achievement of Ethnic Minority Pupils* which revealed that: 'African-Caribbean pupils, particularly boys, "have not shared equally in the increasing rates of general achievement"... In some areas their performance has deteriorated.' [TES 6 September 1996] But there was nothing here for the genetic supremacists and other lunatics to get their teeth into. Black children and their parents were not failing the system; somewhere along the line it was failing them. At age five 4.6% of black children were performing at levels expected of six or seven-year-olds, compared to 3.6% of white children. In Key Stage 1 national tests monitored in Birmingham in 1992 and 1994, black children did better than white ones. But somewhere during the education process something changes radically until, by GCSE year, Afro-Caribbean pupils have the lowest results and have become six times more likely than other children to be excluded from school.

Ofsted does not claim there is a sole reason for this but again emphasises the relevance of social class as well as race and describes the 'unusually high degree of conflict between white teachers and African-Caribbean pupils'.

Work

The SF report contains a long section on 'economic activity', which reveals that in 1995 white unemployment stood at 8%, Indian at 12%, Afro-Caribbean at 24% and Bangladeshi/

Pakistani at 27%. The report points out that although the employment rates of all ethnic groups rise and fall in times of boom and recession, these changes are far sharper for ethnic minority workers who consequently experience less job security and are more prone to be laid off, re-employed and so on, according to the whims of the 'market'.

Among those in work members of certain ethnic groups tend to be employed in certain, particularly low-paid, industries. In Spring 1995 34% of Pakistani/Bangladeshi men of working age were employed in the distribution, hotel and restaurant industries, compared with 18% of Afro-Caribbean and 17% of white men. South Asian and white men were likely to work in manufacturing industry whereas Afro-Caribbeans were most likely to be employed in public administration, education and health. Women from all groups were more likely than men to work in this sector. For example, 57% of Afro-Caribbean women worked in public administration, education and health, compared to 25% of Afro-Caribbean men.

The report gives specific information on employment patterns in areas such as nursing (where Afro-Caribbean nurses are twice as likely to be unqualified as those from other ethnic minority groups) and the civil service (where there are 5.4% ethnic minority workers on average but nil at the two top levels).

One third of Afro-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers work shifts, at least sometimes, compared to a fifth of Indian and white workers. Workers from all ethnic minorities are more likely to be in temporary employment than white workers and Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers are twice as likely to be.

Women's average hourly pay ranges from £4.78 per hour for Pakistani/Bangladeshi women to £6.79 for Afro-Caribbean women (white women average £6.66 but are significantly more likely to be employed part-time). All male groups earn more than the highest paid women workers and, surprise, surprise, white men earn most of all - £8.34 per hour, compared to £7.01 for Afro-Caribbean men and £6.87 for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men.

Entrenched inequality – the legacy of imperialism

In the early years of the post-war boom Britain encouraged immigration in order to create a pool of low-paid workers. Today the only immigrants it encourages are those who can bring £100,000 or more into the country with them. And despite the existence of a black middle class, particularly among those groups such as African-Asians and Chinese people, who often came from middle class backgrounds before they or their parents came to Britain, black workers continue to be consigned to the lowest paid jobs and the worst housing.

CUBA VIVE!

Cuban economy on the road to recovery

On 23 July, Carlos Lage, Vice President of the Council of State and Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers, reported on the current state of the Cuban economy, in particular its performance over the first six months of 1996. This report is of particular interest, since it tells us the effects of measures taken in the 'Special Period'.

The Special Period

As a result of the demise of the Soviet Union, between 1989 and 1991 Cuba lost 85% of its markets; in particular 95% of its main export, sugar had previously been traded through Comecon, which was also the source of Cuba's main import, oil. The market for Cuba's nickel also disappeared. Between 1989 and 1994, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 34% and imports by more than 70%.

As a result of this dire situation, all agricultural and industrial production, transport, construction and power sources were badly affected. Unemployment grew. These were hard times for the Cuban people. On top of this, the situation was exacerbated by the USA's Torricelli Act which tightened the blockade. It is no coincidence that it was in 1994 that the mass exodus of 'rafters' took place and the 'black market' in Cuba was becoming entrenched.

The Cuban response to this was unavoidable. After nationwide consultations, measures were introduced to encourage foreign investment and mediate the effects of the crisis. Joint ventures with foreign capital were encouraged in the fields of tourism and oil and mineral exploitation. The possession of hard currency was decriminalised in 1993. Some state farms were transformed into cooperatives, where the land is still state property, but over and above state quo-

tas, farmers from cooperatives and campesinos can sell produce at special farmers' markets. Self-employment was also legalised to ameliorate unemployment levels. This was now called the Special Period.

We should make no mistake: the Special Period is the introduction of market forces into the Cuban economy. It is, in a special, restricted sense, the beginnings of capitalism. As a result of Special Period measures, some people can become wealthy in contrast to the majority. If these *nouveaux riches* were allowed to buy land or the means of production, and to exploit the labour of others, then capitalism would be restored in Cuba. Of course they are not allowed to do any of this, but as time goes on the pressure from these latent bourgeois forces will grow, both for consumer goods to express their status as an elite and the means to grow wealthier through exploitation. Cuban communists are well aware of these dangers, and view the Special Period as a distinct period of time needed to deal with the crisis, and to restructure the economy for the future. In other words, the Special Period is intended to end, unlike the 'reforms' introduced in the Soviet Union in the 1980s which were a recognition of the failure of their economic system.

That is the background to Lage's report. Are the special measures working?

Economic recovery

At the end of July this year, Lage reported that 'the tendency to economic recovery continues'. GDP grew by 9.6% in the first half of 1996, revealing greater efficiency in the economy. Overall, wages increased by 2.5% and productivity by 8%. The starting point for this recovery was, as we have explained, very low: GDP fell by 34.8% between 1990-93. In 1994 there was only 0.7% growth; in 1995, 2.5%. The 1996 figures are in large part due to the sugar harvest (production grew, for the first time in the Special Period, by 33.6%), and since the sugar harvest comes in the first half of the year, the overall growth in GDP will be somewhat lower for the whole of 1996 – a projected 5%.

Growth in industrial production is also reflected in other areas of the economy: nickel 31%; cement 23%; steel 19%; oil refining 40%. Agricultural production has also improved: vegetables 25%; tobacco 30%; citrus fruit 10%. Due to Special Period measures, tourism grew by 46%.

These improvements took place against an unfavourable background: not least the US blockade which means that Cuba only has access to short-term/high interest loans. Also, over the last year import prices (oil and food) have risen 13%, and export prices have fallen 7%.

Nonetheless, liquidity has improved as a result of higher prices for non-essential goods and the other measures of the Special Period. Many of these measures make it tough for the Cuban people, but in the long term there will be a better correlation between money in circulation and the supply of goods: the peso exchange rate has dropped from P150:\$1 to P22:\$1.

Whilst economic growth has not been swallowed by consumption, there has been an improvement in living standards: in 1993/4 power cuts were scheduled to take place for 14-16 hours a day; now they are scheduled for 8 hours per week. Compared with the first half of 1995 incomes rose 7%. This is not evenly spread: it is higher in the co-operative farm/campesino sector and lower in the state sector. Cuban communists are well aware that this is unfair: 'There are people who have earned as much as 3,000 pesos in one day. A government minister doesn't even earn 3,000 pesos in six months, nor does a teacher. There are people who earn more in a day than a teacher earns in a month, or an eminent doctor for that matter.' (Fidel Castro, *Granma* 14 August 1996). They know this is the result of the Special Period but 'measures must be constantly analysed and readjusted in accordance with the current situation'.

Sales in farmers' markets have grown by 27%, but at the same time prices have fallen by 35% – there has been no price hike. One of the measures introduced in the Special Period was incentives in the form of a proportion of wages in some sectors paid in convertible currency. The use of hard currency stores has gone up by 33%: in 1993 5-10% of people had access to these stores; in 1996 the figure is 40%. But both the farmers' markets and the use of hard currency represent a small part of the economy as a whole. To redress the balance, taxes were introduced for the self-employed and those who have done well out of Special Period measures.

The problems ahead

There are still fundamental problems and the Cubans are the first to state these. They need to restructure the economy, formerly dependent on Comecon markets, to produce goods which are more viable on world markets. They need to make their industries more efficient. Fuel consumption is always a problem while Cuba has no oil of its own, making productivity even more vital. Tourism brings with it problems like prostitution and black markets. Nonetheless they are well aware of these problems and are prepared to face them.

The Cuban economy still has to face the effects of the Helms-Burton Act, the full implementation of which has been

shelved until after the US Presidential election in November. Nevertheless the Cubans are optimistic. They have survived the US blockade since 1961. They recognise that Helms-Burton is intimidatory towards those who want to trade with Cuba, but the reality is that the US blockade simply removes competition from US companies. It is also blatantly illegal and will face action through international treaties: the EU has signalled that it will take retaliatory action against US business if the provisions of the Helms Burton Act are used against European firms.

A conscious way forward

Fidel Castro has repeatedly said that these signs of economic recovery do not spell the end of the Special Period; on the contrary, Cuba is at the height of it and still has much to do. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that even though Special Period measures have introduced inequality and privilege in a limited sense, the balance of power lies with the working class, and the distribution of wealth reflects this. In the world in 1960, the richest 20% owned 30 times more than the poorest 20%; in 1990 they owned 60 times more. The richest in Cuba own four times more than the poorest, and both extremes are very small percentages of the population. Even now, at the height of the Special Period, the infant mortality rate has reached its lowest ever at 8.2 per 1,000 live births.

The Cuban working class is the driving force behind economic recovery. Cuban communists have a very big advantage: they do not make a virtue out of necessity. They know that the Special Period measures have been forced by circumstances – there is no choice. But their conscious relationship to the problems these measures bring allows for continual flexibility and adjustment to ensure that the gains of the Revolution are protected. Their own history shows that this works. In the 1980s the economy followed Soviet models, which in turn led to bureaucratic distortions: what price productivity if nurseries and creches have to close? As soon as the problems were clear, a rectification programme was introduced to ensure that working class interests remained to the fore. With such a history, we can expect the Cuban Revolution to survive.

Carol Brickley

Rock Around the Blockade

Cuba Solidarity Campaign Container Appeal, a militant Moncada Day protest of the US Embassy in July against the Helms-Burton Act and a public meeting addressed by the First Secretary of the Cuban Embassy. In July, too, a sponsored bike ride from Manchester to Blackpool raised £600, and over the summer we held stalls at the CSC festival in Brighton, at Reading festival, at WOMAD in Morecambe, and at the Kurdish peace festival London, joined a march against the JSA in west London and went to Liverpool to support the striking dockers. A magnificent sponsored 30-mile bike ride raised well over £1,000.

Successful stalls at freshers' fayres have been held all over the country, and Rock around the Blockade societies are being set up at the Universities of North London, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan and Central Lancashire, where our first meeting is planned with UJC speaker Alejandro Cusa.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS
London: the campaign meets fortnightly on Mondays, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn). Future meetings Monday 14 October; Monday 28 October; Monday 11 November.
14-19 October: Cuba Solidarity Week of Action
Thurs 17 October 7.30pm: CSC PUBLIC MEETING with UJC speaker Alejandro Cusa, Conway Hall (as above).

Sat 19 October 1-3pm: CSC PICKET US Embassy, Grosvenor Sq, W1 (Bond St tube).
Sat 19 October 8pm-2am: SALSA EVENING. Salsa class & demonstration for beginners, followed by dancing to Club Clandestino. Latin America House, Priory House, Kingsgate Place, Kilburn NW6 (Kilburn or Kilburn Park tubes) £6/£5 class and club; £4/£3 club only.

Sun 10 November: Cuba DAYSCHOOL, 10.30-4.30, Millman Street Community Centre, Millman Street, London WC1 (tube Russell Sq) Manchester:

Sun 6 October: 10-mile SPONSORED WALK. Contact the campaign for details.

Wed 16 October, 2pm: PUBLIC MEETING to bring local Cuba solidarity groups together. SU Building, Manchester Metropolitan University.
Wed 23 October: CAMPAIGN MEETING. The Beerhouse, Angel St/Rochdale Rd.

For more information about Rock around the Blockade and our December brigade, contact the campaign c/o FRCI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N or tel 0171 837 1688.

Youth of all countries, unite!

On May Day this year, the UJC issued a call to 'all those in every part of the planet who love freedom, equality and justice' to participate in the 14th World Youth and Students Festival in Cuba from 28 July to 5 August 1997. They aim to bring together over 10,000 young people from every country to discuss the vast questions which confront them today – eg peace, anti-imperialist solidarity, employment, human rights, education, health, AIDS, drugs, violence, racism, discrimination, culture, sport and all affairs 'linked to the very existence and struggle of young people'. Participants will stay with Cuban families in their homes. Preparatory meetings and discussions are already being held by youth organisations throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

The festival is a unique opportunity for young people to confront the vital issues of the day, in a country which, through its socialist revolution, has proved that it is possible to build a better and fairer society.



TOP: London Rock Around the Blockade supporters raised more than £1,000 on a sponsored bike ride.
BOTTOM: London and Brighton supporters take to the beach to campaign for Cuba

the Festival? We can help with information, speakers, stalls and fundraising ideas. For details contact the campaign at the address above.

Cat Wiener and Hannah Caller

There is still time to join the Rock around the Blockade brigade to Cuba this December and help us raise money for a mobile disco system for Cuban youth. So if you want to support the Cuban revolution and defend socialism – get involved in Rock around the Blockade!

Rock around the Blockade was initiated two years ago by Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Through our work in solidarity with Cuba, we aim to win people in Britain to a better understanding of socialist ideas and their relevance to the struggles we face here today.

We work with the Cuban Union of Young Communists (UJC), the mass organisation of Cuban youth. Last year, at their request, we raised £4,000 for a sound system for a UJC youth centre in the province of Ciego de Avila, which was delivered by last year's December brigade. At the inauguration of the youth centre, UJC leaders spoke of the importance of internationalist solidarity in maintaining the determination and optimism of young Cubans in the face of the US blockade.

This year we are well on the way to raising £6,000 for a mobile disco to be used for street parties for young people all over Cuba. We will be taking another brigade to Cuba in December this year to deliver it.

Our activities over the last few months include raising £8,000 worth of aid for the



The battle for the environment is also the battle for the future of humanity. Environmental issues, once pigeon-holed as of concern only to a middle-class fringe, raise the fundamental questions facing us: the right of the majority of the world's population – the working class and poor – to clean, safe and decent living conditions; the ending of a system of exploitation which

not only wastes human beings in their millions, but now threatens the very future of human existence. It is sad to report that the British left still glories in its ignorance about environmental matters. Only last month, FRFI supporters heard a well-known leftist declare that the environment has got nothing to do with the working class. Oh no? The fact that working-class children are more likely than

any others to join the road casualty figures or the fact that they live near choking roads and suffer asthma epidemics – that's got nothing to do with the working class? That the world is being despoiled and its people poisoned – that's got nothing to do with the working class? This ostrich-like position is, fortunately, not going to survive the new alliances being formed today. The dockers and the

Reclaim the Streets activists are having a weekend of action together in Liverpool. The anti-roads protesters supported the tube strikers. New energies are being unleashed by the protest movement and the political issues of who has power in society and how they can be challenged are on the agenda. The state knows this, hence the levels of repression aimed at the protest movement and

reported on these pages. Some dinosaur-leftists may ignore this, but real movements throughout the world cannot. As an environmentalist from El Salvador wrote recently about the repression being aimed at popular protests against garbage dumps and polluted water: 'The police were looking for ecologists in the way that they used to look for communists...' Maxine Williams

Reclaim the Streets

Brighton: Under attack Organise the fightback



In the early hours of Saturday 24 August people prepared to open up the centre of Brighton and hold a party. The aim was to give the streets back to the people and show how friendly and fun a car-free environment could be. The inspiration came from Reclaim the Streets. Among the participants were mothers with young children and babies, street theatre and puppets, disabled, elderly and those fighting the Criminal Justice Act – overall, a gathering of ordinary people who have had enough of noise and air pollution in their town.

The concept of a single issue group is now meaningless. Campaigns about transport, housing, jobs, local communities' needs, civil liberties – they're all linked up because they're all about people standing up to a system that offers most people very little indeed. Direct action protesters know this and are making more and more links all the time.'

SchNEWS, Justice? newsletter

What followed, however, was not a day of traffic-free celebration but an escalation by police and other state forces against the emergence of a grassroots movement. The police had also risen early and had made their own preparations. Overhanging Churchill Square was a police cherry-picker, looming 80 feet above with its mechanical arm supporting the modern weapon against protest, a spy camera. 'An uninvited guest', according to a *Guardian* report, 'was present at the street party – an inspector with the Metropolitan Police's Forward Intelligence Team who knew about the guestlist'. Before the party protesters had gathered, the police had conferred with him, then darted into the crowd and arrested two people in orange bibs, which signified their role as legal observers. The police were obviously determined to clear the way for the harsh attack they had planned.

More people arrived, unaware of the earlier arrests. Even before the party had kicked off the police had seized a sound system, a bouncy castle and 100 bags of sand. The police vans could be seen on surrounding roads, not as scare tactics but to be used for real. What followed was a

police onslaught. Snatch-squads pounced. The puppeteers, who symbolised the peaceful nature of the demonstration, were removed quickly. The protesters were threatened by police dogs. The empty police vans filled up. A helicopter flew overhead. The spy cameras clicked.

Around 150 police took control of the area, boxing in a small group. More people had arrived and joined a spontaneous street march. 500 people took to the traffic-polluted streets to voice their discontent. At the end of the day, 80 people had been arrested; 49 were charged with various public order offences. This includes the orange-bibbed legal observers who were threatened with conspiracy charges for giving out legal information leaflets. These charges were later dropped, but give some indication of what is to come.

The Brighton attack is one of the many responses to this kind of peaceful protest that has been seen in the last year. Two days before Saturday's demonstration, a benefit gig in Brighton for arrested Critical Mass demonstrators was banned by the police just hours before it was due to start. The gig was to aid legal costs for

three cyclists appealing against charges arising from another demonstration against road pollution. A few days after Saturday's demonstration, police banned a regularly-held public meeting called by the Brighton-based campaign collective Justice? The landlady of the pub where the meeting was to be held was threatened with having her licence revoked if the meeting went ahead.

The police have clamped down because the grassroots movement represents a force. The use of conspiracy charges against environmental activists was started in London but is being threatened nationwide. It's evident that you don't actually have to commit a crime to get lumbered with a charge. The repression by the police and the state is being stepped up because something very positive is happening. The protest movement has grown rapidly over the last few years and now poses a real threat.

Not only has it gathered wide support but it is also linking up with other struggles. For example, on 7 August, a special Critical Mass was followed by an occupation of the London Underground headquarters, in support of the tube workers, who

Environmental activism: the State wises up

The escalating level of repressive state activity directed towards environmental protest illustrates a growing understanding by state bodies, and the economic interests they protect, of the changing nature of popular protest within their own national boundaries, and of the increasingly volatile condition of the global population as a whole.

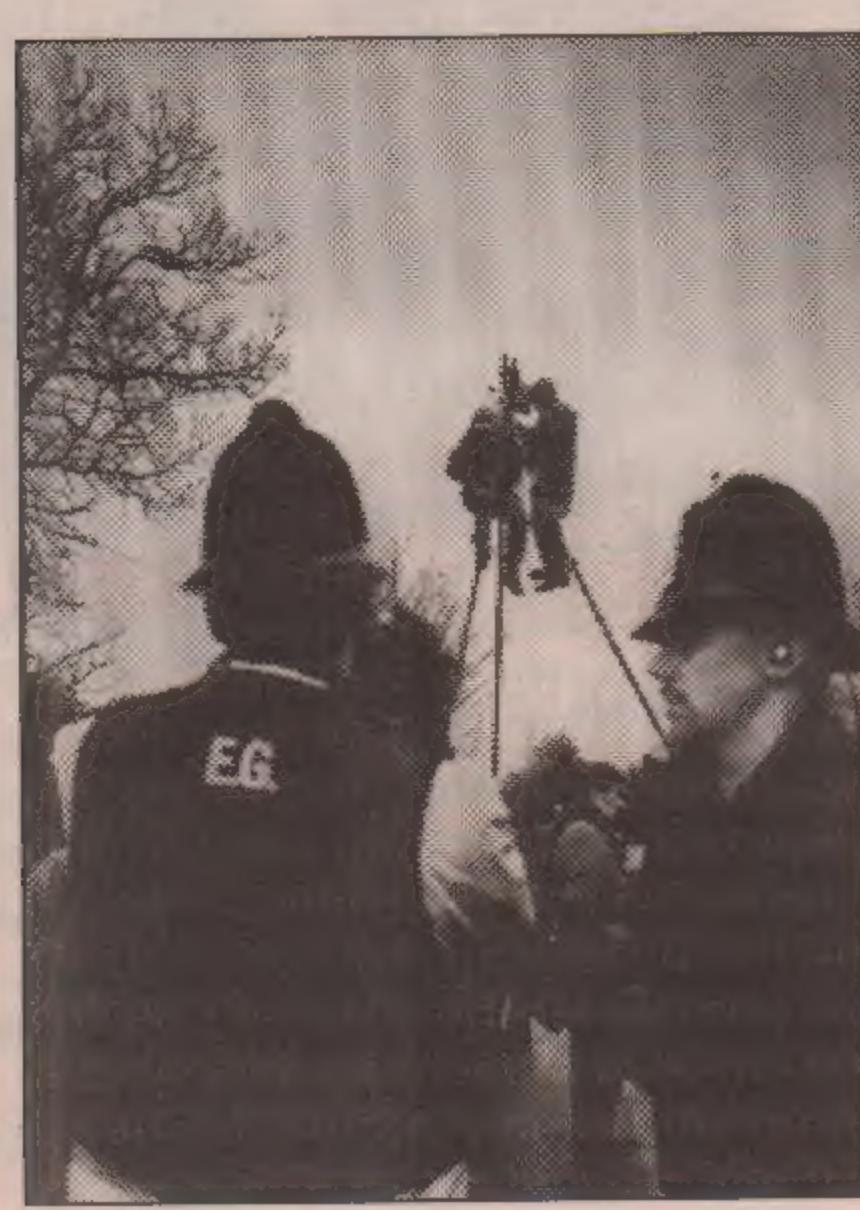
In Britain, the Association of Chief Police Officers has been using the Anti-Terrorist Squad to monitor environmental activism (EA) since March this year. Special Branch officially changed its priorities to concentrate on EA in 1994, and has been passing information on protesters to McDonald's security, for example, since 1989. George Monbiot, writing in *The Guardian*, speculates: 'There can be little doubt that environmental campaigners, being "a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose", now qualify for MI5's attention, under the terms of the new Security Services Bill'.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act was used to stripsearch participants in this year's Big Green Gathering, and the Criminal Justice Act has

been instrumental in the broader repression of EA throughout the country. The Metropolitan Police's Forward Intelligence Team has been monitoring EA throughout the country, focusing in particular on the growing strength of the Reclaim The Streets (RTS) movement. They have used full surveillance and raided the RTS London office, removing its computers, as well as supplying information crucial to the ambush at Brighton and the assorted conspiracy charges now facing its members. A high level of infiltration throughout such movements is also presumed but not established.

In addition to the direct actions of official state bodies, much of the necessary activity is conducted by apparently independent bodies such as

private security firms, detective agencies and the CCTV systems operated by many local authorities, businesses and public transport operators. In April 1995 the British government granted £5m to 104 local councils to aid the installation of CCTV cameras (which can take place on any land without a licence under the Criminal Justice Act). The CJA also empowers private security firms to use violent entry into squats, which is accepted as part of a broader transnational of 'marginal' police activities into the hands of private (unaccountable) organisations. At the Newbury protest all activity is monitored by private investigators (Brays), whose files are used in criminal proceedings against the protesters, as well as for broader intelligence pur-





McLibel nears finale

The 'McLibel' High Court libel trial brought by the \$26bn a year McDonald's corporation against two unwaged London Greenpeace supporters is expected to finish this winter. Running since June 1994, the trial has become the longest civil case in British legal history.

What began as an exercise in intimidation, aiming to use the oppressive UK libel laws to silence international opposition, has become an ongoing embarrassment for the corporation. No legal aid is available for those sued for libel and the two activists, Helen Steel and Dave Morris, have also been denied the right to a jury (McDonald's argued that the issues were 'too complex'). Despite this, the defendants have succeeded in effectively putting a multinational corporation on trial over its business practices, generating worldwide publicity and criticism against it actions. Over 180 witnesses have given evidence on issues including the connection between multinationals, cash crops, and starvation in the third world; damage to the environment; the links between the promotion and sale of a junk food diet and the major degenerative diseases in

Western society; the lousy conditions of workers in the catering industry and McDonald's hostility to trade unions.

As the parties present their closing speeches, the protest movement against McDonald's and companies like it continues to grow. One and a half million leaflets have been handed out in the UK since the writs were served and the support campaign is aiming to step up the pressure in the months ahead. However this action stands against a corporation which spends £50 million a year on advertising and promotion in the UK alone (\$1.8bn worldwide) so all concerned activists and groups are urged to get involved as soon as possible.

Steve

Saturday 12 October: day of support for McDonald's workers. Pickets in London and Manchester, leafleting nationwide.

Wednesday 16 October: annual worldwide day of action against McDonald's. 'Adopt a store' action at end of trial. Details to be announced. Contact McLibel Support Campaign on 0171 713 1269.

McSpotlight website:
<http://www.McSpotlight.org>
Leaflets £15 per 1,000 from 0115 958 5666

Third Battle of Newbury

Contrary to what you may have been told, the battle of Newbury bypass is far from over. Clearance work is not finished and Costain, the main contractor, is still evicting land protesters from the route. Fifty security guards protect the wire in 12-hour shifts. They are paid £4 an hour and have not even been given warm clothes. Some say they have not been paid for a month and Pinkerton Security Services Ltd are having problems finding new guards. Guards have shown sympathy towards the issues raised by protesters and it is not uncommon for them to join protesters for a cup of tea after their long shifts. Some have even joined the protesters, after seeing the light. But Brays, the detective agency

workers, with their warm clothes, green hats and cameras, are hated. Police often come into the protest camps about 3am to confiscate tools and arrest any protesters breaking bail conditions. Earlier, protesters dug a 12-foot hole to delay building and it took 24 hours for them to refill it. It was dug up again only hours later by protesters.

The battle is not over yet. The more people who go to Newbury and help and get arrested for the cause, the better. Fed by community, solidarity and above all, activity, a green revolution is growing from capitalism's rotten corpse...its most precious flowers are joy and autonomy.

Emilio

Costain humiliated

Described in the *Evening Standard* as one of the greatest humiliations ever for the board of a publicly-quoted company, the protest on 6 September at the Costain AGM was an unqualified success. Costain is the main Newbury bypass contractor, and 300 people had purchased shares in order to get into the AGM.

Before the chairman, Sir Christopher Benson, could even begin his introduction, he was interrupted by a shareholder demanding that Costain's video, which was recording proceedings, be turned off and the press allowed in. Benson refused but, after slow handclapping and shouts, came the first of many concessions he was to make as he slowly lost control of the meeting.

He was bombarded with questions about the Newbury bypass. It is unwanted and unpopular, ploughing through woodland to save a few minutes' journey time. The violence of security guards was also raised. The board did their best to avoid the questions and even refused to tell their own shareholders how much money they expected to make from the Newbury contract. When Sir Christopher tried to stop questions the meeting became chaos, with people storming the podium, climbing walls, blowing whistles and throwing streamers. A reporter from the *Financial Times* described it as the best AGM he had ever been to!

People are not helpless against increasingly unaccountable multinational companies. On 6 September, we took John Major's advice and became stakeholders. It stands as a warning to other companies.

Ted Hunter

Starving the world

Christopher Haskin, Chairman of Northern Foods, recently told Channel 4 viewers that 'if the world went organic today, the world would starve.'

Just in case we are talking about the same world, perhaps we should remind him of some facts:

- Every year, 14 million third world children die before they reach the age of five
- 180 million children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition
- 25,000 people die every day of waterborne disease.

Of 40 of the world's poorest countries, 36 export food to the USA. For example in Brazil, where half the population suffers from hunger, 20% of arable land is used to produce soya which is exported to be fed to cattle, to make burgers.

Cattle consume 10 times as much grain and soya as humans do. Of 145 million tons of meat and by-products used every year, 124 million tons are waste. (The

equivalent value, £20bn, is more than enough to feed, clothe and house the world's population for a year!)

- In Britain, £1,156 million was spent in 1996/97 on the control of BSE
- £150 million is spent every year in Britain just to remove the pesticides and nitrates of modern farming from our drinking water.

Which world are you talking about, Chris?!

USEFUL CONTACTS

- Ago Action - 01404 815729
Advance Party - 0181 450 6929
Exodus - 01582 508 936
Freedom Network - 0171 738 6721
Hunt Saboteurs - 0115 959 0357
Justice SchNEWS - c/o PO Box 2600, Brighton, BN2 2DX 01273 685913
Reclaim the Streets - 0171 254 2290
Road Alert - 01635 521770
Small World Media, Undercurrents - 0171 272 5255
SQUASH Squatters Rights - 0171 226 8938

e future



vere on strike. The coming 'Stop the Clampdown - Reclaim the Future' is another event where the anti-CJA movement, together with Reclaim the Streets, Advance Party, Freedom Network and other grassroots organisations have linked up with the Liverpool dockers for three days of parade, protest and action. As the player says, 'the oppression we all experience is from the same source... so let's resist it together!' It is this sort of collaboration between movements that the police and state forces fear.

The result of the Brighton street party is important. The lessons learned underline that the state is scared. Now it is more important than ever to really organise, mobilise and unite together. We have to believe in ourselves and our ability to change things. Tomorrow is too late or what we should have done a long time ago!!

Susie

The street party was brought together by ITS but a defence campaign is being mounted by Justice? Support is needed! Money is urgently required. Donations should be sent to the campaign. Also subscribe to SchNEWS for up-to-date news - plus it's a good read!

SHEILA FREEMAN

poses. The destruction of the land here, as in other land destruction sites, is undertaken by a private contractor, much of whose property is defended by private security firms such as Reliance security who conducted the evictions at the M11 campaign, Solsbury Hill and Brynfenllys. To steal documents belonging to London Greenpeace and to break into their premises, McDonald's hired two agencies (Kings and Bishops/ Westhall) who used at least seven agents between 1989 and 1991 to infiltrate London Greenpeace (as far as has been admitted in court).

The activity of such 'private' firms, however, can be explained not just by their direct relation to government payrolls, but by reference to the specific interests which their actions further - the interests of capital and multinational capital.

The clampdown on EA in Britain is part of the broader attack on working class and political movements throughout the country, and is a reflection of the increasingly political role which EA has to play in the current and future struggles. The brutal

character of this clampdown in turn forces the individuals and movements concerned into a greater understanding of the true nature of the modern state and the character of the system it protects. But the true battle against multinational supremacy is taking place, and will continue to escalate, in the areas where these companies conduct the 'labour intensive' aspects of their production, where their exploitation of wage labour and their destruction of the world environment are rampant. It is on the basis of this process that the world economy operates, and it is against the effects of this process that current and immediate future mass action will be aimed.

In acknowledgement of this, the guardians of US capital are now following the same policies as their British counterparts: that is, to defend those who created and worsen the situation, and spy on and arrest all those who react against it. This summer John Deutch, Director General of the CIA, gave a speech entitled 'The environment on the intelligence agenda' to the World Affairs Council in Los

Angeles. In it he showed an understanding of the present and future environmental disasters which the world is facing, and an understanding of the effects this situation will have on the global population. Environmental degradation, encroaching deserts, erosion, and over farming...forces people from their homes and creates tensions between ethnic and political groups as competition for scarce resources increases.'

The CIA's response to this? Spy-satellites orbiting the planet which their masters are destroying, keeping an eye on the restless natives who are dying. Deutch showed that they had been using satellites to estimate crop sizes in North Korea for years. Back home, the complaints and demands issued by the Zapatistas after the 1993-94 uprising were recently quoted by a lecturer at Britain's Army Staff College in Camberley, Surrey.

Those forces clearly understand the far-reaching consequences of the multinational destruction of the planet and are preparing themselves for action in response. It's about time that we did the same.

Steve

In a quiet news period in early August, the media seized on the story of a woman, pregnant with twins, having a selective abortion because she could not cope with two children. A few weeks earlier, the destruction of 3,000 embryos which, under the terms of the Human Fertility and Embryology Act, had been held in cold storage for four years, received full press coverage as anti-abortionists knelt on the pavements of Whitehall to pray for the 'reprieve' of these four-celled microdots. Amidst hysterical talk of the 'culling' of embryos, the 'laxity' of current abortion legislation and the ethics of selective abortion, anti-abortion organisations like LIFE and the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) were given full coverage in the media in calling for a tightening of the 1967 Abortion Act.

These attacks culminated in SPUC obtaining an injunction against the woman at the centre of the 'twins' row to prevent her having a selective termination until she had 'considered the financial support available to her'. Although it was subsequently revealed that the woman had in fact had the abortion several months before, this was the first time any anti-abortion group has been successful in directly preventing doctors from performing an abortion in Britain since the Act was introduced. Fuelled by the publicity, the all-party 'pro-life' group of MPs is preparing to put a new anti-abortion Private Member's Bill before the next session of Parliament. This will be the 17th parliamentary challenge to the Abortion Act since it was passed in 1967.

A class question

The right to abortion, the right to control our reproductive lives, is central to women's struggle for equality. For the vast majority of women, it is rarely a question of 'choice': affordable, accessible childcare is virtually non-existent, forcing women to survive on benefits or temporary, part-time and low-paid work. Small wonder that women with children – especially single mothers – make up the poorest strata of society. In working class families, the burden of domestic work, including bringing up children, falls primarily on women. All this, together with the lack of adequate housing, play facilities for children etc means the concept of choice exists only for the middle classes, who have always been able to pay for nurseries, nannies, cleaners, private schools and so on – or to opt for terminations in private clinics, whatever the legal status of abortion.

It is for this reason that the question of reproductive rights – and the demand for free abortion on demand – is essentially a class question. Before the legalisation of abortion, the majority of the women who died in their thousands from botched backstreet or self-inflicted abortions, performed without anaesthetic, who were horribly maimed or, at best, treated as criminals, were poor working class women. For the rich, there was always someone who knew the right Harley Street doctor who would perform the operation for the right amount of money.

While the 1967 Abortion Act undoubtedly represented a step forward – abortion has disappeared from records as a cause of maternal death – for working class women it remains only a limited victory. Its provisions have never been extended to the north of Ireland. Unlike the majority of European countries, where abortion is available on demand at least up to 12 weeks, in Britain two medical practitioners are needed to certify that pregnancy poses a greater risk to the physical or mental health of a woman, or of any existing children, than a termination. This means that even a woman who has been raped or who is under 16 has no automatic right to abortion. A woman has to find a doctor prepared to sign the required form – which may mean travelling long distances if



support the cutting of welfare payments to women who have more than one child.

Not only that, but so great is their commitment to the sanctity of human life that in the US groups like Operation Rescue have been responsible for the murder of six doctors and abortion clinic workers, for wounding 15 people, hundreds of assaults, the bombing of 150 clinics and 600 incidents of vandalism of clinics in the last few years. In Canada, two doctors have been shot and seriously wounded. In Britain, Operation Rescue pickets abortion clinics and harasses clinic workers and women seeking abortions. In one incident, a Catholic priest was charged with assault after violently attacking a pregnant clinic manager.

Eroding our rights

The current attack on abortion rights is part of a creeping, insidious attack on women. As the working class is pushed deeper and deeper into poverty, it is women who are bearing the brunt of the restructuring of British capitalism. It is they who make up the bulk of the poor – whether as low-paid and part-time workers, single parents or pensioners; they who carry the burden of 'care in the community' as unpaid care workers and domestic servants; they who suffer most from a collapsing health service. Hand in hand with this has gone a vicious ideological onslaught on women – blaming single mothers for all the ills of society, blaming 'feminism' for everything from male unemployment to the fragmented, individualistic society capitalism has created. Yet, in the face of this, middle class women, having won all the rights they deem relevant and achieved a well-heeled niche, speak of the struggle for women's rights as outmoded. Yet 'what we are seeing', wrote *The Guardian's* Charlotte Raven, 'is not the triumph of feminism as such, but the success – and complacent withdrawal – of a single selfish strand... it's all very well declaring victory from an Islington kitchen, not so easy from a Birmingham sweatshop, a battered women's refuge, the streets about King's Cross'.

So it is now acceptable to be on what passes as the left and to be both religious and anti-abortion – if it suits you. Alison Hadley, of the Brook Advisory Service, which concentrates on offering sex education to young women, notes a shift away from the call for free abortion on demand. 'People...have lost the sense of it as a feminist and political issue. It is not something to fight for any more, and there is a reluctance for women to out themselves on abortion'. After the birth of her child last year, Naomi Woolf, reconstructed bimbo of the post-feminist women's movement, published an article extolling the joys of motherhood and suggesting until feminists examined the moral and ethical implications of abortion, and were prepared to accept that not all abortions were equally valid, they could not enter into debate with anti-abortionists on equal terms!

The rest of us can have nothing to do with this claptrap. Statistics suggest that four out of ten women in this country have had or will have an abortion at some time. It is directly in our interests to fight not only for free abortion on demand as a basic and absolute right, but at the same time for the conditions for working class women that would, at last, allow them really to choose whether, and when, to have children in a society fit to bring those children up.

On Tuesday 19 November the National Abortion Campaign is holding a public meeting in response to the possibility of an anti-abortion Private Member's Bill (the draw will take place on 7 November). The meeting will also launch the NAC 1997 Year of Action, campaigning for abortion on demand for all women in Britain. Committee Room 6, House of Commons. Tel: 0171 923 4976 for further details.

Abortion a woman's right

When the question of abortion surfaces in the national press, as it did with a vengeance this summer, it is always in terms of attacking women's fundamental right to control their own reproduction. CAT WIENER reports.

her own GP is anti-abortion – often having to face patronising or uncooperative NHS consultants. She then has to endure a seemingly interminable wait for a hospital bed or scrape together the money for a subsidised clinic (nearly half of women having abortions in England and Wales end up having to pay for them). By that time, the pregnancy may have progressed to the stage where a simple D&C is no longer an option and labour has to be induced – a painful and traumatic ordeal.

As NHS funds are cut and clinics forced to close, the situation can only get worse. No wonder then, as leading fertility expert Lord Robert Winston stated during the 'aborted twin'

row: 'No woman I have ever met has ever gone through a termination without the most serious consideration. It is something that is extremely difficult to do.'

Yet where abortion is freely available on demand and the majority of abortions are performed before 12 weeks, trauma and ill-effects are reduced, as is the case today in Cuba and was true, prior to 1989, in Hungary, Poland and East Germany. Due to shortages of contraception, abortion frequently functioned as a contraceptive measure. Since all these countries also provided accessible childcare, housing and basic rights, women had a real choice. Since the collapse of the socialist bloc, abortion has been criminalised

in some Eastern European countries; in Poland, doctors who perform abortions face two years in jail. Meanwhile living standards for women, in particular, have plummeted. It cannot be stressed enough – the struggle for the right to control

not to have any aborted – endangering not only her life but that of all eight foetuses. Some demand that the foetus should fall under the auspices of the child protection services – leading to the appalling scenario we have seen in the United States of an alcoholic woman being prosecuted for the attempted murder of her unborn child.

While groups like SPUC and LIFE raised 80,000 in a sordid publicity stunt to pressurise one woman not to abort a twin, they have never campaigned for decent housing and financial support for young single mothers, for adequate childcare provision, for anything that might make having children something other than a condemnation to pov-

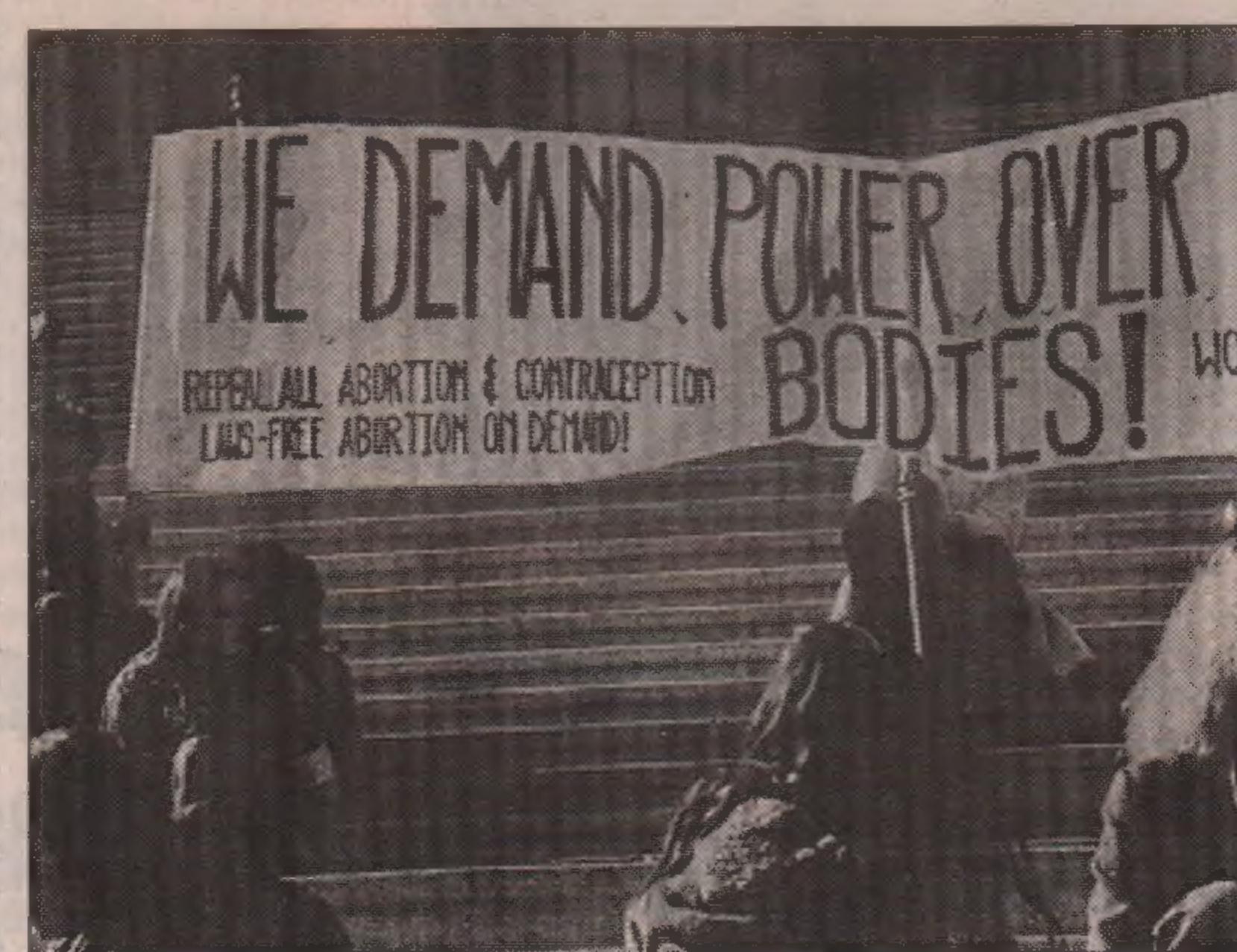
erty and deprivation for thousands of working class women and their children. Contrast this with the moral outrage when it was suggested that men might perhaps pay something towards the upkeep of their children via the Child Support Agency. Many so-called 'pro-life' groups also oppose sex education, contraception and fertility treatment – ie anything that would allow women to make their own choices about reproduction.

In the United States, the growing anti-abortion movement, on which groups in Britain increasingly model themselves, is made up of people who oppose state programmes to guarantee prenatal care and nutrition programmes for pregnant women and

our fertility is part of the overall struggle of women against oppression and hence part of the struggle of the working class.

Who are the murderers? – a hypocritical morality

Anti-abortionists are anti-women. They do not believe that women are entitled to make a personal choice about their own bodies and their own reproduction. They hide behind talk of 'the sanctity of life' and human rights, but their concerns are restricted strictly to the 'unborn child', the foetus. And even this is rank hypocrisy. When Mandy Allwood became pregnant with octuplets, they were quite prepared to join the throng offering her money





Santos Trafficante Junior (centre), postwar Mafia figure and drug dealer in the late '60s

LAND OF flowing poison

'Bolshevism is knocking at our gates. We can't afford to let it get in. We have got to organise against it, and put our shoulders together and hold fast. We must keep America whole and safe and unspoiled. We must keep the worker away from Red literature and Red ruses; we must see that his mind remains healthy.' Al Capone, *Liberty Magazine*, published by the United States National Association of Manufacturers.

Opium and cocaine, the main ingredients of heroin and cocaine respectively, are produced by poor, oppressed peasantry in the Third World. The final products are chiefly consumed by the oppressed working class of industrial capitalism. In between are those who get rich, those who own and organise the trade, who profit from the exploitation of peasants and addictions of workers, and who bank the proceeds. The peasants work for perhaps 0.5% of the selling price of what they produce. The addicts divert ever greater parts of their income and, through theft and dealing, the incomes of those around them, to a single commodity.

Drugs represent an attempt to escape. In prisons the screws let them flow. The other method of escape tolerated is suicide. The drug trade is integral to modern capitalism; decaying and parasitical, where wealth accumulates in fantastic proportions to the most useless and unproductive of speculations. Through the spread of drug use among youth, capitalism marks them out as expendable. It has nothing to offer them but delusions and self-obsession. Out of meaninglessness and hopelessness it builds a thriving business and a culture where corruption is revered.

World military expenditure is running at about \$800 billion a year; the trade in illegal drugs is estimated to be worth \$750 billion. Drugs put soldiers in mansions, police officers behind the wheels of Mercedes, buy guns for death squads and take the fight out of our youth. The drug trade is used by the state to gain access into working class and alternative communities; it provides informers and intelligence and is used to criminalise entire sections of the population. Drug barons are incorporated into the ruling class. The vast fortunes they amass make them powerful components of capitalism, able to influence and even take state power. Al Capone understood – their enemy is Bolshevism.

Raw opium fetches \$66 to \$75 a kilo in Burma or Afghanistan where the poppy is grown by peasants who have no alternative means of income. It sells for \$400 to \$600 a gram as refined heroin on the streets of a Western city. This is a 7,000-fold price mark-up. As heroin passes through the various stages of brokers, wholesalers down to street retailers, it is usually adulterated. By the time it reaches working class communities it is at its most unreliable and dangerous. Wealthier addicts can procure purer, graded heroin.

Drugs are marketed with sales teams, brand names and promises of 'hits' and 'highs', 'rushes' and 'euphorias'. The youth are prime targets. The August 1996 *British Medical Journal* published a survey stating that 42% of school pupils aged 15-16 have tried illegal drugs: 2% of those surveyed had used crack (cocaine), 1.5% heroin, and 7% of girls and 9% of boys had taken ecstasy. Noticeably, 94% had consumed alcohol in the month before the survey was taken. Designer

ciders and alcoholic fruit 'lemonades' were the most widely used drinks. Both borrow from the imagery of rave culture and pop for packaging and marketing. The cider Max was deliberately branded with the intended association 'Mad Max'.

Drugs' illegality enhances their appeal to youth as the street-level pushers pit their wits in a mock and futile battle with the law. The result is often a £100 a day habit that feeds off working class communities, pushers intimidating council estates, children in gangs turned against each other and their parents, violence, sickness and disease with 'drug-related deaths' on the rise, police looking the other way and taking a cut from the revenues, while the drug lords are away, out of the country, spending £50-100 million fortunes. Politicians wax indignant, propose

General de Gaulle recruited them into French intelligence services. The 'French Connection' enjoyed virtual immunity while it plied heroin until the late 1960s. In Italy the Allies turned to the Mafia for help. In Sicily in 1948 alone, 948 people, mainly communists, were murdered. CIA operative Miles Copeland commented, 'Had it not been for the Mafia the Communists would now be in control of Italy'. For three decades Sicily was the Mafia's major trans-shipment point and refinery for heroin.

The growth of Burma's opium production in the 1950s needed CIA aircraft, Thai military protection and Taiwanese finance as Britain and the USA sought to attack China using Kuomintang troops stationed along Burma's border. 'We have to fight the evil of Communism, and to fight you must have an army, and an army must have guns, and to buy guns you

ment. The Taliban conquerors of Kabul have inherited the trade and its big business backers.

Get Castro

The methods used by the post-1945 Mafia were devised by Meyer Lansky and Charles 'Lucky' Luciano. Heeding Capone's advice they struck a deal with the US ruling class. During the 1920s Prohibition on alcohol Lansky befriended the future Cuban dictator Batista, who supplied molasses for 'bootleg liquor' production. When Prohibition ended in 1933 the Mafia turned to trading heroin and prostitution. They moved into Havana.

In 1947 Luciano travelled to Cuba to establish it as the Mafia's main heroin trans-shipment route and refinery on the way to the USA. This lasted until the triumph of the Cuban Revolution at the end of 1958. Cuban Mafiosi fled to join their Florida partners. They returned to Cuba in 1961 with the failed Bay of Pigs assault. That year Florida Mafia boss Santos Trafficante Jr and Capone's Chicago successor Sam Giancana began collaborating with the CIA to assassinate President Fidel Castro.

By 1970 the Bay of Pigs Cuban Mafia veterans had formed what the US Attorney General described as 'a nationwide ring of wholesalers handling about 30% of all heroin sales and 75-80% of all cocaine sales in the USA'. Of the three Cuban-born ring-leaders of this enterprise two were Bay of Pigs veterans. After being arrested and tried one had his conviction thrown out on a legal technicality, another was released on probation.

Currently, the US government has been forced to open an inquiry into reports that the CIA helped Nicaraguan Contras flood the black people's areas of Los Angeles with crack cocaine to pay for the war against the Sandinistas in the 1980s. This August a declassified US State Department document stated, 'Drug traffickers have penetrated the highest levels of society and government institutions in Antigua, Trinidad and Tobago, St Kitts and Nevis, Aruba, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic.' The Cuban Mafia helped introduce Colombian cocaine to the USA.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong was established as a British colony after two 'Opium Wars' fought by Britain in the last century to force China to accept opium. Santos Trafficante arrived in Hong Kong in 1968. There he met with the Chinese syndicates who had fled Shanghai and the communists in 1949. During the 1970s Hong Kong became the site of the major complex of heroin refineries in the world. The



Afghan mujaheddin finance the purchase of weapons through their control of the opium trade

more prisons, pass more laws – popular cosmetics. Some alternative, some rebellion, some quest for happiness this turns out to be. Drugs are being used by the rich and the state to keep people down as their lives worsen.

The tale of the growth of international heroin is complex, but the common features of its past are with us more than ever today.

Heroin

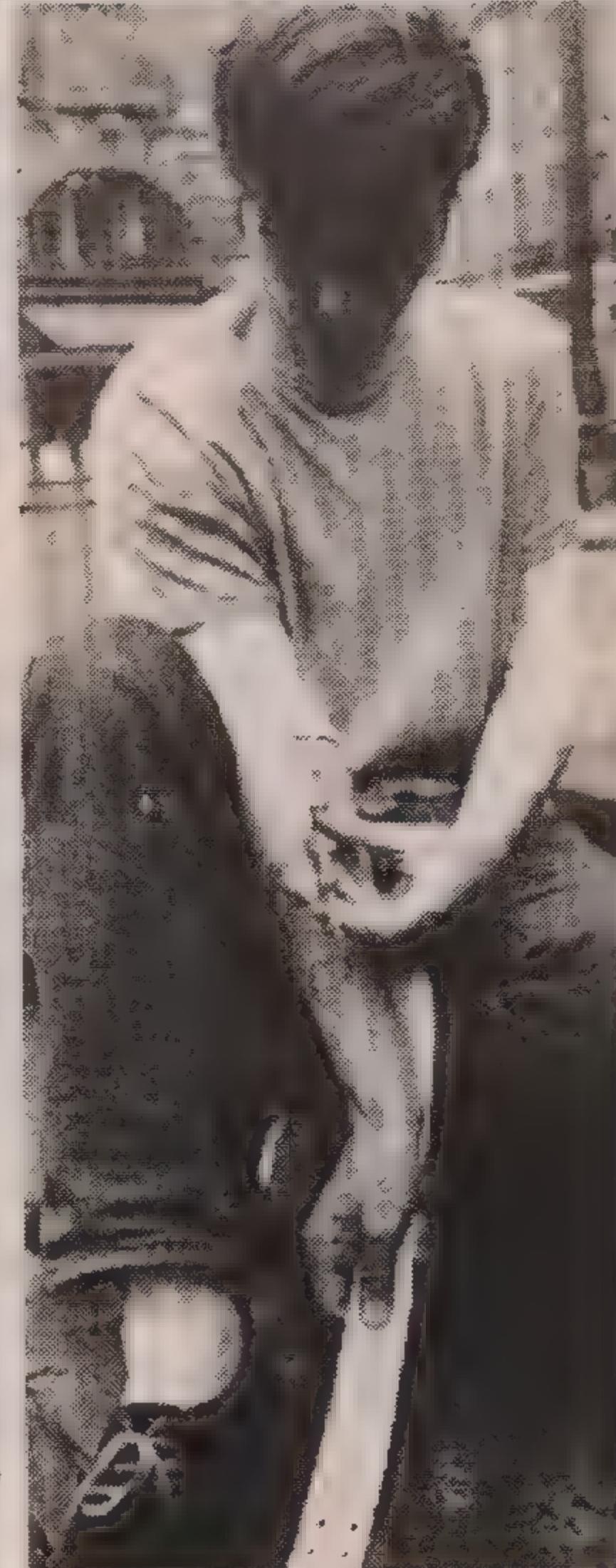
In 1995 Customs seized over 1 ton of heroin across Britain: an 80% rise on the 1994 figure. A senior Customs investigation officer said, 'All the evidence points to a massive increase in the volume of heroin being targeted on the UK. We believe the increase is supplier-led.' Every increase in output and new opium crop requires credits and markets, finance and bankers, logistics of distribution and political protection.

The modern heroin trade was shaped in imperialism's struggle to confine and kill socialism. At the end of the Second World War the USA used the Corsican syndicates against the communists in Marseilles. Gen-

eral de Gaulle recruited them into French intelligence services. The 'French Connection' enjoyed virtual immunity while it plied heroin until the late 1960s. In Italy the Allies turned to the Mafia for help. In Sicily in 1948 alone, 948 people, mainly communists, were murdered. CIA operative Miles Copeland commented, 'Had it not been for the Mafia the Communists would now be in control of Italy'. For three decades Sicily was the Mafia's major trans-shipment point and refinery for heroin.

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ment. The Taliban conquerors of Kabul have inherited the trade and its big business backers.



Shooting up in central London – some pursuit of happiness this is

Hong Kong Police is British-run.

Deputy Police Commander Peter Godber fled to England in June 1973 to avoid prosecution after being asked by the Police Commissioner how he had accumulated savings of \$880,000. An enquiry into police corruption in Hong Kong reported 'narcotics has always been a tremendously lucrative source of corruption' since 'it was quite possible for a police officer to make more money in a corrupt transaction...than he could earn honestly after 20 years of service'. A programme of shutting the refineries and curbing police involvement in the racket followed. 43 detectives fled the colony to Taiwan, Canada and Brazil taking with them \$80 million. Hong Kong Chinese officers divided the proceeds of bribery etc with their senior British officers. At least one syndicate was spared long prison terms because of its role in providing intelligence on mainland China to the Taiwan regime. After the threat of a police strike the governor of Hong Kong declared an amnesty for police officers accused of corruption since, as he put it, Hong Kong was 'on the brink of anarchy'.

The Hong Kong police had worked with the Chinese syndicates to regulate heroin supplies and manage its price. Sporadic raids would be mounted and addicts would be hired to put on an impressive performance for the press, especially invited for the occasion. Similarly, in New York in the 1960s, the Mafia would select dealers to be raided by the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. Federal agents achieved impressive records; promotions and even bigger takes from drug proceeds followed. Similar patterns have emerged in the British and Irish drugs trade in recent years. In fact, it is the inevitable tendency for any capitalist police force, as the Hong Kong inquiry admitted.

Hong Kong's role in the international drugs trade has evolved and today it is an administrative and financial centre of the business, deploying the lax off-shore banking regulations that Britain specialises in to maximum effect.

(Future issues of FRFI will follow the trail of the money into the banks and look at Britain today. See also Trading in Death, FRFI 58, and Cocaine Capitalism, FRFI 92, 95.)

It was a massacre. Not since Sabra and Chatilla had I seen the innocent slaughtered like this. The Lebanese refugee women and children and men lay in heaps, their hands or arms or legs missing, beheaded or disembowelled. There were well over a hundred of them. A baby lay without a head. The Israeli shells had scythed through them as they lay in the United Nations shelter, believing that they were safe under the world's protection. Like the Muslims of Srebrenica, the Muslims of Qana were wrong.' (Robert Fisk, *The Independent* 19 April 1996)

On 18 April, at least 102 Lebanese civilians died in an Israeli artillery barrage that hit the UN compound, in the little hill village of Qana in southern Lebanon during Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath (see FRFI 131). The Israeli army bombarded the compound, HQ to the Fijian units in Lebanon, with 30 or more shells for up to 10 minutes after their first round landed. The area had been a UN headquarters for 18 years and the Israelis knew there were 700 refugees sheltering there.

The Fijian battalion headquarters are clearly marked on Israeli maps. The UN buildings are painted with the white and black UN signs and are lit up at night. The Israelis can communicate with the UN. Yet no warnings were given of incoming fire. If the Israelis did not intend to strike the base, then the only other explanation is criminal incompetence on a massive scale.

The Israelis hit the base while allegedly aiming at rocket launchers over 350 metres away. Some intelligence sources believed the Israelis acted too hastily before checking what was nearby. Yet the Israeli army's apparent inaccuracy is incomprehensible. The Israelis use the US-made Firefinder radar system, which plots the launch site and path of artillery shells, mortars or rockets and can pinpoint the launch site to within 10 metres. The first salvo should hit either precisely on target or close to it – certainly not 350 metres or more off target.

The UN investigation: US warns against scapegoating Israel

In response to the massacre the UN initiated an investigation headed by Dutch Brigadier General Frank Van Kappen. While the UN Secretary General waited for the report, the United States warned against 'scapegoating Israel' and said it would not tolerate 'finger-pointing' at its ally. The US Ambassador to the UN Madeline Albright attempted to forestall any discussion and criticism of Israel in the Security Council. Denigrating the anticipated report, another US diplomat stated that 'Rather than being used as a learning process of what happened at Qana, the report will be a finger-pointing exercise in the direction of Israel.' The US even threatened to block moves by UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali to stand for another term should the report prove critical of Israel.

Throughout the UN investigation Israel continued to pressure the UN. In a final submission General Van Harle, who commands the artillery branch of the Israeli army, claimed that faulty maps were the reason for the 'mistakes'. A senior UN official dismissed the claim: 'It is difficult to believe! They said that their maps were bad. Well, come on!' Shimon Peres went so far as to blame the UN for the massacre, accusing it of failing to inform Israel that refugees were sheltering in the UN camp. Peres claimed that 'we didn't have the slightest idea and I think that it is a scandal that they were permitted into the camp without letting us know about it.'

The UN report uncovered this pack of lies. A Lebanon-based UN official retorted: 'The UN camp has been at Qana for 18 years. They (the

Israel and the massacre at Qana

The Israeli state has developed and sustained itself only by means of violence and terrorism against the Palestinian and Arab peoples. Based on the colonial conquest of Palestine, it is a racist settler-colonial state. To maintain the fruits of its conquest against the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people Zionism has never refrained from resorting to violence and terrorism. Indeed Israel only survived by such methods. As this article by STEVEN KATSINERIS shows, violence and terror have been standard instruments of Israeli policy right from the inception of Zionism in Palestine.



The horrific aftermath of the Israeli shelling of the Qana United Nations compound in April 1996

Israelis) have pictures of every village in southern Lebanon and know who lives in every house there... The Israelis are insulting our intelligence. They had been flying drones over Qana for a week before the massacre. And even if they thought there were no civilians in the camp – which we told them there were – does that mean that they thought it was legitimate to shell a UN headquarters?

In fact the UN force in Lebanon had announced just a few days after the start of Israel's 'Operation Grapes of Wrath' that 6,000 refugees had entered its compounds, of which Qana was one of the largest and most established. Indeed subsequently Major General Moshe Ya'alon, head of Israeli military intelligence, was forced to admit that 'The fact that civilians were evacuated from villages into UN facilities was known to us from the second day of the operation.'

UN finds Israel fired deliberately at the base

In the light of all this, the UN's findings that Israel deliberately fired at the Qana base was hardly surprising. Israeli authorities had systematically lied about events during the slaughter. The Israelis repeatedly claimed that they had no drones in the area. Witnesses testified otherwise and the

presence of a drone and a helicopter was video taped by a UN soldier. During the 10 minutes of fire there was a perceptible shift in weight of fire from the alleged target – a Hezbollah mortar site – to the UN compound. The UN investigators stated that whilst it could not be completely ruled out that the shelling was a result of gross technical and/or procedural errors, it must conclude that the base was deliberately targeted by Israeli fire.

Naturally the Israeli government dismissed the report as 'absurd' while the US asserted its conclusions to be 'unjustified'. The facts nevertheless remain facts.

Terror against the people

Like the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the 16 day multi-billion dollar war of 1996 was a war not so much against the Hezbollah as a terror campaign of indiscriminate bombing and shelling against civilians. During the Israeli operation over 400,000 people were ordered to leave southern Lebanon. All the Lebanese and Palestinians living south of the Litani river (20 miles from the Israeli border) were told to flee their homes. Those who ignored the orders did so at their own peril as villages, roads, cars, clinics, water reservoirs, orchards and other utilities were obliterated by the Israeli armed forces.

public relations disaster like Qana became. Zionist contempt for Arab people was revealed in remarks by Israeli gunners just after the Qana slaughter. They had no regrets: the *Jerusalem Weekly* which quotes officer Kol Hair: 'It's war, in a war these things happen... it's just a bunch of Arabs.' Another soldier is quoted as being told by his commanding officer that 'this is a war... we were shooting well... Arabs, you know, there are millions of them.'

Before Operation Grapes of Wrath, Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Ori Or said that 'action must be taken which will cause the Hezbollah and Lebanese government to take responsibility for the lives of Lebanese residents... A situation in which residents of Nabatiyeh and the residents of villages provide a shield for Hezbollah activity is insufferable.'

So the Israelis went about removing this shield by means of terror against the population. The result, according to Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* was 'all in all, aside from the horror at Kfar Kana (sic)...a deluxe operation.' Qana may have been a horror, but Israel will not bother setting up an inquiry or commission, fearing a repeat of the 1982 inquiry they set up which found their own military officers guilty of personal responsibility for the massacre of thousands of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Israel: a terror state

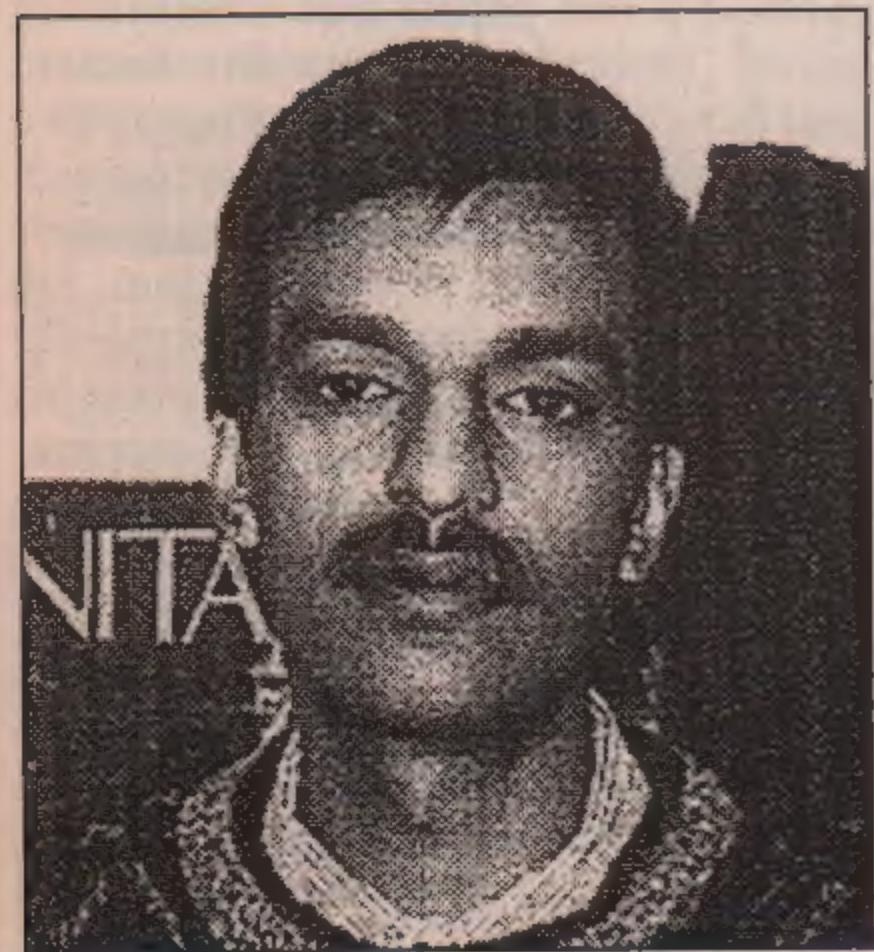
The briefest glance at Zionist history demonstrates that it has secured its existence only by means of violence and terror against the masses, against the civilian population.

- On 26 July 1933, 53 Palestinian residents of Haifa were killed in an explosion in Melon Market. That month over 100 unarmed Palestinians were killed in Zionist terror attacks. It was the true beginning of the Zionist movement's well-planned campaign to seize Palestine from the native Arab-Palestinian population.
- By 1946, with the withdrawal of the British colonial administration, the campaign of ethnic cleansing reached a climax. With several massacres like that at the village of Deir Yassin, where 254 Palestinian civilian residents were killed on 9 April 1948, the Zionist forces seized much of Palestine. Over 800,000 were driven from their homes or fled in terror.
- During the 1948-67 period some 385 Palestinian villages were systematically destroyed by Israeli forces, leaving thousands more homeless refugees.
- And the massacres continued. At Kafr Kassem village, 47 Palestinian inhabitants were killed by Israeli border guards on 29 October 1956. After protests in Rafah and Khan Yunis refugee camps 386 civilians were killed in November of the same year.
- In June 1967 Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza strip prompting another 400,000 Palestinians to flee. Israel also expelled over 100,000 other Palestinians.
- On 20 February 1973 the Israeli air force shot down a Libyan civilian aircraft killing 120 passengers.
- In June 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon, killing at least 20,000. When its troops entered West Beirut, they supervised the pitiless slaughter of 2,000 people in the Palestinian refugee camps at Sabra and Chatilla.
- During the Palestinian Intifada of the 1980s, a team of Americans on behalf of Physicians for Human Rights commenting on Zionist violence and terror stated that: 'If this were war, many of the actions whose results we have seen would be declared atrocities.'

From the very start of the Zionist colonisation of Palestine, violence, terror and massacres have prevailed and Israel continues to use such methods as required to maintain and build the Zionist settler state, maintain the dispossession of the Palestinians, and destroy whatever resistance the Palestinian, Lebanese and other Arab people employ.

Free Satpal Ram!

In November this year Satpal Ram will have been in gaol for ten years, convicted of murder for the killing in self-defence of one of a gang of six white men who attacked him in an Asian restaurant in Lozells, Birmingham. Since losing his appeal in November 1995, Satpal has been subjected to constant harassment and brutality at the hands of the prison system. Under the provisions of the so-called 'Continuous Assessment Scheme' he is moved between gaols every 28 days; his possessions and legal papers invariably taking most of that time to catch up with him. The following interview with Satpal was conducted by means of a combination of visits and letters.



FRFI: Can you say something about the treatment you have received?

Satpal: During my time in prison I've suffered many indignities and hardships. The abuse and maltreatment I have had to endure and the injustices which have been perpetrated against me and which I've seen perpetrated against other prisoners amount to flagrant violations of human rights.

Conditions vary from gaol to gaol, as does the degree of solidarity you can expect from other prisoners. In long-term prisons, although conditions are extremely oppressive, there is more solidarity between prisoners, who have to stick together and make a stand against the oppression they face on a day-to-day basis.

One thing which runs right through the prison system is racism – not only is prison a racist institution but the POA, whose members work in the prisons and implement the policies day to day, is a blatantly racist organisation.

FRFI: Did you have any experiences prior to your arrest and conviction which prepared you for this kind of institutionalised racist oppression?

Satpal: While I never expected to be convicted and imprisoned for defending my own life, I had already seen and experienced plenty of what can only be described as heavy-handed and racist policing. I come from Handsworth, a socially deprived inner-city area of Birmingham, the scene of two major riots in 1981 and 1985 and I grew up in a climate in which our community was targeted and our youth were criminalised.

FRFI: Before your appeal last year, you were optimistic. But as soon as the hearing began, and when we visited you after the evidence was complete but before the judgement had been delivered, it had become obvious what the outcome would be.

Satpal: Looking back on the appeal hearing now, it was a complete farce. The same prosecution lies that were used to convict me were once again used to justify dismissing my appeal.

While the verdict was a major setback to myself and to all those who have campaigned on my behalf, I can't say that I was really surprised by the decision. The track-record of the British system of 'justice' speaks for itself. The Birmingham Six, Guildford Four, Maguire Seven,

Judith Ward, Stefan Kiszko, the Tottenham Three, Cardiff Three, all the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad cases. I could go on and on. Justice in this country is a myth.

The only legal avenue left open to me is to pursue an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, as I've effectively exhausted all the legal channels in this country.

FRFI: You have an active defence campaign and other supporters up and down the country. How important is this kind of network of support to you?

Satpal: Outside support is vital to people in prison. Without it you are totally at the mercy of the system. Anybody unfortunate enough to find themselves incarcerated will soon find that links with the outside world are imperative. As it stands, the system isolates and terrorises those within its grasp. Outside support doesn't mean that they won't try to destroy you, but it does make it a lot harder for them to get away with it and gives you far more strength to continue resisting.

FRFI: Do you have any message to the readers of FRFI, in or out of prison.

Satpal: I would ask your readers to continue their support for my struggle. The only thing which will force the system to recognise and accept that I've been wrongfully convicted is sustained pressure.

The 'continuous assessment' scheme

In March 1996 Satpal was subject to a violent attack by prison officers at Long Lartin who forced him to undergo an anal search he had refused (see FRFI 132). Satpal has now been granted legal aid to pursue a civil action for assault. However, the Prison Service has labelled him as a 'control problem' and is subjecting him to the provisions of 'Stage 5' of its 'Management Strategy for Disruptive Inmates' (Instruction to Governors 28/1993): the so-called 'Continuous Assessment Scheme', less ceremoniously known as 'the ghost-train' or 'the merry-go-round', under which prisoners are moved between gaols every 28 days and almost always located in the punishment block. No actual assessment of any description is actually carried out. Since Long Lartin Satpal has been moved to Bristol, Brixton, Strangeways, Parkhurst, back to Strangeways, The Wolds, Norwich, Elmley and back to Brixton again. You can write to him there: Satpal Ram (E94164), HMP Brixton, Jebb Avenue, London, SW2.

FREE SATPAL RAM – MARCH AND RALLY TO MARK A DECADE OF INJUSTICE

Saturday 16 November 1996

Assemble 12 noon, Holyhead Road, Handsworth, Birmingham
1pm March through Handsworth
3pm Rally at Burbury Park Centre, Wheeler Street, Lozells

Organised by Free Satpal Campaign
For further information and details of transport from London and elsewhere telephone 0121 507 1618

The not-so-great escape scandal

'Absurd', 'fiasco', 'catastrophic' and 'the great escape' were just some of the terms used to describe the release in August of 537 prisoners, on average three months before the completion of their sentences.

The 'fiasco' began when Home Office lawyers advising the Prison Service decided the 1967 Criminal Justice Act had been wrongly interpreted for 30 years and that prisoners serving consecutive sentences should have time spent on remand prior to trial and conviction deducted from each separate sentence. Accordingly, some prisoners began to be released, until Michael 'Prison Works' Howard intervened to close the 'floodgates' pending further consultation. At this stage a prisoner, who had not been released but would have been eligible under the new arrangement, sought a judicial review and lost. The government took this as vindication of their original interpretation and there have been no further 'early' releases since.

The whole episode was given a massively high media profile, with the Labour Party, probation service, POA and the whole gamut of vested interests queuing up to push their own angles. Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw excelled himself by attacking the most right-wing Home Secretary the Tories have managed to produce for being soft on crime. Straw demanded publication of the crimes and sentences of all those released, and played heavily on fears that 'serious sex-offenders' were now in our midst without having undergone 'proper' pre-release procedures.

The probation service, fighting off government attempts to privatise, militarise or abolish it, was happy to contribute plenty of sound-bites on this tack: instead of being 'prepared' for release, these unfortunate prisoners had been 'thrown onto the streets' without warning – a menace to others



and to themselves. It would have been kinder to keep them inside.

There was also much talk, mainly from the POA, but also from the likes of the Penal Affairs Consortium, of unrest and riots which would ensue among frustrated prisoners who had seen their own opportunity for freedom and had it denied.

Myths abounded, including the one about remand conditions being vastly better than those for sentenced prisoners. There was a time when this was true: remand prisoners were allowed daily visits and could be brought hot meals, sweets, crisps, cigarettes, newspapers and all manner of other items. Nowadays, remand conditions are often worse than those for convicted prisoners and remand prisons or wings even more overcrowded and less well-equipped.

If Howard was slightly less perturbed by all this flak than might have been expected, it is not only because he is thick-skinned, but also because in a perverse way the

'absurdness' of the episode provides fuel for his long-term aim regarding remand time, which is to stop it being made automatically deductible from the sentence altogether. In a belated attempt to crawl back into the Home Secretary's good books, ex-Prison Service Director General Derek Lewis echoed this approach in a *Guardian* article. Lewis did, however, also point out that one in five of the 10,000 remand prisoners will be acquitted, and suggested they should be entitled to compensation. Neither Howard nor Straw is likely to be impressed by that suggestion.

There are currently 56,000 prisoners in England and Wales, 5,000 more than this time last year. They cost the taxpayer around £2,000 per week each. When Howard's new sentencing laws come in the prison population will rise even more sharply. A dozen more such 'fiascos' would barely begin to reverse the trend.

Nicki Jameson

MORE PRISONERS FEWER RIGHTS

No more gifts of radios

For seven years the Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund (TOHMF) has sent books, periodicals, writing paper, posters and radios to prisoners. Radios have been particularly appreciated by prisoners with few outside contacts or whose families cannot afford to send them such items; however this work has recently run into huge difficulties.

In line with new security procedures introduced following the White-moor escape, prisoners are no longer allowed to receive radios and other electrical items by post or via visitors. They must instead order them themselves from Argos or another catalogue scheme recognised by the Prison Service and pay direct from their private cash account. For the TOHMF this is a great setback. We have always sent specific items rather than money and have managed to shop around for cheaper or bulk suppliers. However, even if we decided to change our way of operating (assuming we can afford it) and send cash, we then fall foul of the Incentives and Earned Privileges

Scheme (IEPS) new system for administering private cash.

Under the IEPS previous allowances for phone-cards, hobbies, food and large items such as radios have been abolished. Prisoners are entitled to spend (or save, up to certain limits) only £2.50 private cash per week if they are on Basic regime, £10 on Standard and £15 on Enhanced. If a lump sum is sent in by arrangement for a purchase such as a radio this rules out any other private spending in the number of weeks needed to accrue such a sum. It is then at the governor's discretion whether the lump sum is treated as an advance or whether the prisoner has to wait until s/he has 'earned' sufficient credits to make the purchase.

This maze of regulations renders the simple provision of a radio as a gift almost impossible.

No more fresh air

If a radio was never a 'right' and always a 'privilege' there used to be one statutory right prisoners were sure of: an hour's exercise a day. Not any more! On one of the hottest days this summer, the government announced it was abolishing Prison Rule 27 on 'time in the open air'. The Prison Rules don't have to be debated in Parliament so the change was just made. Apparently 'health care ad-

vice' (from who or where we don't know) says that 30 minutes is an appropriate time for daily outdoor exercise but in future whether prisoners get one minute, one hour or no time at all will be at the 'discretion' of governors who will make their decisions depending on 'weather, security and control considerations'.

MEETING: BRITAIN'S GAOLS 1996 – MORE PRISONERS, LESS RIGHTS

An evening in support of prisoners' rights. Music, poetry, prisoners' art exhibition

Speakers include: Ann Whelan (Bridgewater Four Campaign), Tim Owen (barrister)

Friday 18 October, 7pm
Bridewell Hall, St Bride Foundation Institute, Bride Lane (off Fleet Street), London EC4.
Admission £6 waged/£2 unwaged (includes glass of wine)

Organised by the Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund, BM Box 5960, London, WC1N 3XX.

Reviews

Prisoners and the law

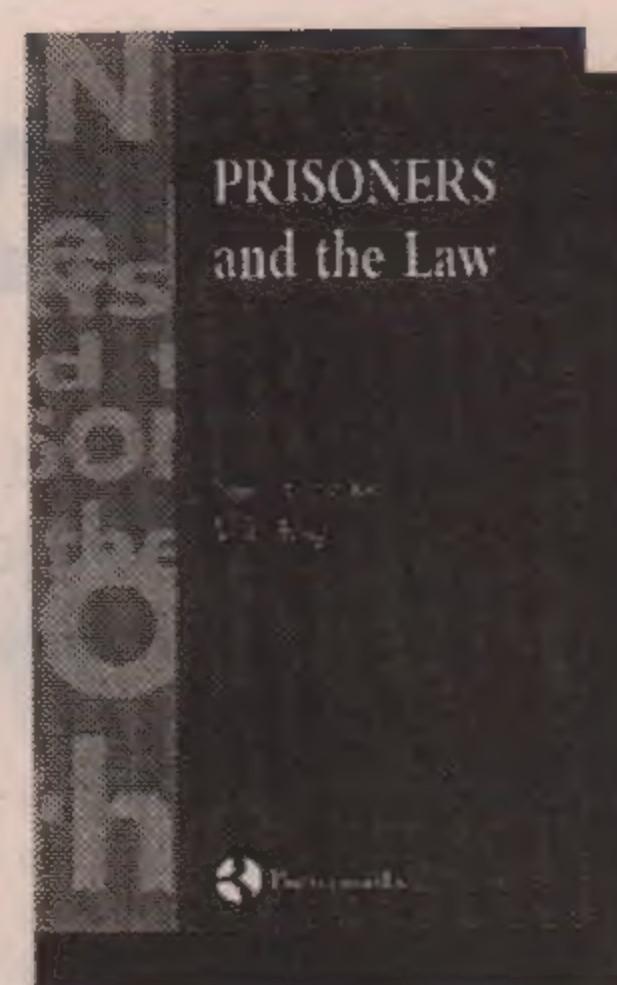
■ Prisoners and the Law by Simon Creighton and Vicky King, Butterworths 1996, £35

For many years now a number of us in the radical prison reform movements have discussed the idea of making a 'writ-kit' available to prisoners. The kit would consist of a step-by-step guide which would enable inmates with grievances to seek redress in the courts once the normal complaints channels have been explored. In our view the need for this has always been self-evident; today, post-Woolf Report, with Michael Howard running riot through the prison system, need becomes necessity.

Every day, in every prison, decisions are made and actions taken which massively – and often adversely – affect the lives of prisoners, many of which are unfair, indeed unlawful. Most prisoners simply accept such measures with a shrug and a 'What can you do?' attitude. Some protest through the usual channels, invariably with the usual result – a rock-solid defence of the status quo. Others take the path of unauthorised dissent; these prisoners will suffer greatly for their defiance. A few, very few, inmates have sought relief from the courts. Most prisoners, understandably, view the law as being exclusively an instrument of punishment; but some prisoner-litigants have proved, time and again, that the excesses of the prison system will not stand the scrutiny of an 'outs-

ide' tribunal. The likes of Mark Leech and Chris Hague have helped to establish the principle that most prisoners do have some rights.

This book goes a long way to explaining to inmates and lawyers precisely what those rights are and how to go about obtaining them through the courts when they have been denied first-hand. It takes the reader through the maze of prison legislation, old and new, and through the prison rules themselves; it comprehensively outlines the areas in which prisoners can and cannot look to the courts for impartial judgement. For example, each of the most common actions in 'Private Law': negligence, assault, loss of property etc, receives several paragraphs or pages in its own right. The second sphere of legal interference is that of seeking a judicial review, which usually, as far as prisoners are concerned, follows an operational or administrative decision. It is in this area that prisoner-litigants have achieved their most far-reaching victories to date, such as reviewing of disciplinary proceedings within prisons (*Leech v Deputy Governor of Parkhurst 1988*) and *R v Secretary of State for the Home Department ex parte Doody*, which gave lifers the right to know the level at which their tariffs had been set and to make effec-



tive representations regarding the same. It is of course this area, covered by judicial review, which most affects the day to day, year to year running of prisoners' lives. Although, as if we didn't know it already, to prove that judges and keepers will always piss in the same pot on certain matters, it is noted that their lordships will never (are 'very reluctant to') intervene in the areas of control and security.

Prisoners and the Law goes further than supplying information on how to take legal action; it deals in great detail with virtually every aspect of prison life: from categorisation to mandatory drugs tests, from strip-searches to discharge grants; it gives

inmates a considerable insight into how the gaolers view, and are supposed to treat, those in their charge. Certainly for this reviewer (somewhat unexpectedly assessing *Prisoners and the Law* from inside Strangeways) the book will provide serious ammunition if and when I cross swords with my keepers. Of particular fascination, for example, were the two pages detailing the highly-structured way in which the prison authorities address the question of informers. (Watch out – there's bound to be a well-rewarded grass about!)

The authors of *Prisoners and the Law*, Simon Creighton and Vicky King, have drawn upon their vast, and highly valued, experiences (as solicitor and case-worker for the Prisoners' Advice Service) to produce a well-crafted book that fills a great need. For the average prisoner-litigant, however, it is not quite the finished article. Essentially it is a lawyer's manual (sold at a lawyer's price) and the average prisoner may find it hard-going in places. It is well worth the effort however; if enough prisoners were to read and use it, the courts would soon have had enough and those in charge would have to put their house in order. So, order this book through the library and get the most important parts photocopied and distributed. Remember, the system uses the law to put us where we are as lawbreakers; let us use it, whenever and wherever our captors break the law in their dealings with us. See you in court, comrades!

Eric Allison



Life on the street

■ As starlight grows cold by Conway Xavier, October Press 1996, £5.99

This is a fast paced and entertaining novel dedicated to the Hit Racism For Six campaign. It aims to capture a small slice of town life in a community in Kent. The author takes themes of everyday life: sexism, racism, job insecurity, alcoholism, homosexuality and pornography, and presents them in a hard-hitting and uncompromising study of their effects on the way we live and interact. The hierarchy of workers in the local hospital serves to symbolise the way in which our individuality is undermined by the status given to the particular jobs we do. In that, it clearly illustrates the extent to which our social relationships are affected by our own relationship to the means of production; the way that all our lives revolve around the struggle to work for the money to live.

When the protagonist, 18-year-old Karen loses her job, the personal consequences are devastating. 'It's my first job, my only likely job. I've got no qualifications, no money and we need my wages... What will I tell my Dad? He'll kill me. He says only the lazy are made redundant. He'll hit me.'

As she struggles to make sense of her situation she realises that her employers 'don't look at past performances, they look at cost.' She also sees those people around her whom she respects compromising their own dignity in the struggle to survive in an hostile world full of conflict and confrontation.

At times the dialogue is forced and awkward, self-consciously street-wise. Nonetheless, the central characters are vivid and real. We witness them developing an understanding of the society they live in and the need for them to take a part in improving their lot, not just as individuals, but most effectively as a community. The author gives a shocking, raw dissection of the fascist mentality, so stark that the reader cannot help but be appalled. Ultimately they are brutal and vicious thugs who cannot but be vehemently opposed.

The author does not stop at the portrayal of a group of fascist murderers, he also directly tackles the existence of institutionalised racism and the limitations of fighting for justice and equality through official bureaucratic channels. The lesson this book preaches is that the only effective way to fight the brutality of racism is through direct action, a spontaneous reaction of anger from the people themselves. For this we need unity and courage. Then we are stronger than any bully and more effective agents of justice than any police representative.

This novel offers no serious political analysis but it is gripping and full of tension – a storyline at times extravagant, but with issues the reader can relate to. Full of strong language and strong imagery, this is not delicately written for a liberal audience – you have been warned!

Helen Yaffe

Cuba: revolution within a revolution

■ Women and the Cuban Revolution edited by Elizabeth Stone, Pathfinder Press, first published 1981, reprinted 1987, £8.95

'We have put behind us forever women's terrible plight under the bourgeois neocolonial republic, when they were subjected to a brutal and double exploitation, in conditions of humiliating dependency and legal submission to men, when their minimal formally established social rights were flouted. The future of working women, of peasant women, of the toiling families in general, held nothing but squalor, degradation, ignorance and suffering. In the case of many women, it meant domestic service or prostitution. For almost all women, in keeping with the dominant bourgeois mentality, it meant being regarded as a decorative figure and sex object, whose place depended on class affiliation... On January 1 1959, the doors to a new life opened for Cuban women who, from the very start, regarded as inalienable their own revolutionary process that was beginning and to which they had made an important contribution.' Cuban Communist Party thesis, 1975

This book contains excerpts of addresses made by Fidel Castro to the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) over three decades and speeches by Vilma Espín, FMC President since its foundation. It also reprints in full 'On the full exercise of women's equality', presented to the Communist Party's first congress in 1975. Appendices include the maternity law for working women and the Family Code.

It offers a clear picture of the conditions for women in pre-revolutionary Cuba and depicts the oppression of women under capitalism, particularly for the poor and for black women. It describes the struggle for women's emancipation and the obstacles to achieving full equality.

The FMC was formed in 1960 to involve all the women of Cuba in carrying forward the Revolution and realising their own liberation. As Lenin said, 'The experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much the women take part in



it.' In overthrowing capitalism, Cuba's socialist revolution had created the conditions where equality for women could become a reality. In 1960, the FMC had 17,000 members. By 1980, there were 2.5 million, 80% of the female population over 14. The FMC has been invaluable in integrating women into the revolutionary process and allowing them to realise their full potential. It has been at the forefront of fighting prejudice amongst men who opposed women becoming guerrillas, who do not take an equal part in domestic work, or do not feel women have an equal right to a job or education. These points are emphasised in the Family Code of 1975.

Much has been achieved, including basic rights to health care, education, a job, paid maternity leave,

child care and abortion. An ideological offensive against sexist images was launched. One of the tasks of the FMC, as Vilma Espín says, was 'to change both women's image of herself and society's image of women.'

In 1975 the Communist Party resolved to build 400 daycare centres, homes for the elderly, special schools for the disabled, laundries and so on. Between 1975 and 1981, childcare facilities doubled. The thesis stated categorically that 'the equitable distribution of the inevitable household tasks is an unavoidable revolutionary obligation', and resolved to combat the prejudices and discrimination that existed in daily life. Women were encouraged to stand for leadership posts, and work was done to combat material obsta-

cles that might hinder them.

Fidel Castro talks of women's participation as the revolution within the revolution. Vilma Espín describes the conditions of women in Cuba before the revolution, their role at every stage of the struggle and their achievements. 50% of the literacy brigadistas in 1960 were women, and by the mid-60s 50% of Cuba's medical students were women, as were 50% of the 1,200 Cuban teachers who went to work in Nicaragua in 1979.

However, the Communist Party and the FMC recognised that there was still a long way to go to attain full equality, that consistent ideological effort would have to be maintained, and there must be ongoing attempts to find practical solutions to the daily chores that still remained in general the burden of women. Marx, Lenin and Engels's analysis of the family and the economic ties that affect women under capitalism have been central to the ideological struggle.

There is no doubt that the US blockade and the rigours of the Special Period have particularly affected women in the last few years.

Building programmes for laundries, childcare centres and so on have had to be halted or diminished; the shortage of household products, food and so on continue to be a burden on women.

Prostitution, eradicated after the revolution, is making a comeback in tourist areas. The FMC and the Communist Party of today are aware that the Special Period represents a setback to building socialism and hence to achieving full equality for women. They remain in the forefront of confronting these problems and finding ways to overcome them.

What the material in this book, dating back 15 years, shows is that without socialism there can be no possibility of achieving equality for women, and the practical and ideological steps taken by Cuba towards that goal, in the face of the relentless propaganda war and economic blockade by the USA, makes inspiring reading for men and women.

Hannah Caller

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RCG

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RCG COMMUNIST FORUMS

LONDON

Sunday 20 October 2.30pm

THE POISONOUS ROOTS OF RACISM

Speaker: Maxine Williams
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn)

Sunday 17 November 2.30pm (venue as above)

PALESTINE: NO PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE

Speaker: Eddie Abrahams
For further details tel 0171 837 1688

MANCHESTER

Wednesday 10 October, 7.30pm

LABOUR'S MANIFESTO THE ROAD TO SOCIAL FASCISM

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

IN MEMORIAM

FRFI remembers IRA volunteer Ray McLaughlin, who died on 9 September 1985. He spent 10 years in British gaols and fought throughout his life as a Republican, a socialist and an internationalist.

We also remember Jim Reilly, Luton Sinn Fein and Home Counties Organiser for Sinn Fein (Britain), who died on 26 September 1980. He devoted his life to the struggle to free Ireland from British rule.

LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX

e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

EVENTS & DEMONSTRATIONS

THE KURDISH NATION: THE WAY FORWARD

Public meeting

Monday 7 October, 9.30pm
Camden Town Hall, Council Chambers, Judd St (King's Cross tube)
Speakers and video showing
Organised by Kurdish community, Kurdish Student Society, Kurdish Solidarity Committee and Peace in Kurdistan Campaign.

BRITAIN'S GAOLS 1996 – MORE PRISONERS, FEWER RIGHTS

An evening in support of prisoners' rights

Music, poetry, prisoners' art exhibition
Speakers include:
Ann Whelan (Bridgewater Four Campaign), Tim Owen (barrister)
Friday 18 October, 7pm
Bridewell Hall, St Bride Foundation Institute, Bride Lane, London EC4.
Admission £6 waged/£2 unwaged (includes glass of wine)
Organised by Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund, BM Box 5960, WC1N 3XX

KURDISTAN: REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

Photographic exhibition dedicated to Kurdish journalists
16-22 October, Kufa Gallery, 26 Westbourne Grove, London W2
Admission free

FREE SATPAL RAM – MARCH & RALLY TO MARK A DECADE OF INJUSTICE

Saturday 16 November 1996
Assemble 12 noon – Holyhead Road, Handsworth, Birmingham for march through Handsworth
3pm – rally at Burbury Park Centre, Wheeler Street, Lozells
Organised by Free Satpal Campaign
For further information and details of transport from London and elsewhere telephone 0121 507 1618

END STUDENT DEBT!

National demonstration against tuition fees and debt
Wednesday 20 November. Assemble 12 noon outside University of London, Malet Street (Goodge St or Euston tube)
March to rally in Kennington Park
Called by the Campaign for Free Education

FUERA GLORIA ESTEFAN!

Protest against Gloria Estefan's support for Cuban counterrevolutionaries
3 December, 7pm, Nynex Arena, Manchester. Organised by the Fuera Gloria Estefan Campaign, Dept 113, 1 Newton St, Manchester M1 1HW

The classic campaign t-shirt – high-quality Fruit of the Loom white cotton, red and black design of Che Guevara and 'Viva Cuba' on the front and 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back – is still available for only £7 inc p+p. XL only. 'Rage against the US blockade' Che Guevara badges are 50p.

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(cheques/P/Os to Rock around the Blockade)

Donation to campaign £ _____

Total £ _____

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Inhuman regime at Belmarsh

We would like to request help in lifting the draconian measures and inhumane conditions we are being subjected to in Houseblock 4 in HMP Belmarsh. This is a desperate call for help from Category A remand and convicted prisoners who have been driven to despair by the new regime at Belmarsh.

We are locked in our cells for 22 and a half hours a day. This is the same treatment that prisoners in the segregation unit who are being punished for breaking prison rules get. This is the result of a new regime introduced on 14 July 1996, whereby our entitlement to time out of our cells has been reduced from an average of four hours a day to one and a half hours a day, ie it has been cut by almost two-thirds. Basically, we have been put on a punishment regime en masse without being offered any explanations or being told what's happening.

Belmarsh is supposed to be running a differentiated regime with three tiers: Enhanced, Standard and Basic. The majority of inmates are on the Standard regime, which currently entitles us to only one and a half hours out of our cells during the day. There are 11 or so inmates on the Enhanced regime who get about an extra hour and a quarter's association in the evening. The prison cannot 'promote' any more Cat As onto the Enhanced regime,

even those who deserve it, because we are told – of lack of staff. Under this new regime the Standard, Basic and punishment regimes receive equal treatment and we are told that no-one has a chance of getting on to the Enhanced regime, regardless of eligibility! Hence there is no incentive at all for us to better our behaviour.

On 9 July we were moved to Houseblock 4, an oppressive and enclosed building that lacks natural light. Houseblock 4 is supposed to be more secure than other houseblocks. Millions of pounds have been spent on security gadgets and measures, yet security is still used here to oppress us and justify the abuse of our rights.

The prison has special security measures for Cat A inmates which include monitoring all our mail and phone-calls and strip-searches before and after visits. Any phone numbers or visitors have to be 'cleared' before we can contact them. Clearing visitors takes months (even up to a year) even for family members. And yet they totally invalidate all the strenuous security measures by accommodating non-Cat A prisoners on the same spur as Cat As. We mix with non-Cat A inmates freely during our (very short) association or on exercise. The result is that all these security measures are a farce since they can easily be sidestepped by any Cat A prisoner wishing to do so, through non-Cat As.

All Cat As, remand and convicted, are deprived of participation in available prison facilities. We are not

allowed access to the library, education or work and we are not allowed to pray in the prison chapel. We are very often denied the use of the gym and when we do use it we only get half an hour.

On top of all this, the medical care is appalling. We normally have to ask several times to see a doctor or a dentist and it takes weeks and months of repeated requests.

We are allowed very little contact, either by phone or through visits, with our families and friends. According to the prison's rules we are entitled to three visits a week but the prison only has facilities for less than, on average, three visits a fortnight per inmate. Our lawyers also face difficulties in arranging visits to the prison.

Most of us are on remand awaiting trial. The time spent on remand varies from six months to two years, a very long time by anyone's standards. How are we supposed to be fit enough (mentally and physically) to face trial after such a long time under such conditions?

In fact, those of us (except the few on the Enhanced regime) who have spent the day with our solicitors preparing for our trials then get no association at all, not even to have a shower or call our families, and those who have been at court all day are only allowed out of their cells for a few minutes in the evening to make a phonecall.

We are bogged down trying to survive this inhuman treatment.

It leaves us with little energy or will to work on our cases. We are innocent until proven otherwise, but these remand conditions deny us our right to be able to prepare adequately to face a fair trial.

There is an acute lack of communication between the inmates and the prison management. The governors hardly ever come onto the spur and it is extremely difficult to see a governor, even by written application. When we try to get any clarifications from the officers about the rules and procedures of the prison we very often get different versions from different officers. Hardly any of us were given the Prisoners' Information Pack on arrival here or subsequently and we don't have access to any written publication of the Prison Rules.

Since the new regime was introduced tension has been rising amongst the inmates; we are getting desperate and have no-one to turn to in this prison. We have petitioned the governor and complained verbally and in writing, but we have had no response or indication that things will improve.

We beg you to help us in any way you can to lift this collective punishment.

Signed by 46 Category A prisoners, Houseblock 4, Belmarsh prison
1 August 1996

Hope in a world of poverty

Although as a foreigner in Havana, you inevitably meet Cubans intent on reaping some of the wealth they see dripping off the tourists around them, they are the minority, the ones who hang around tourist areas. It is when you get the chance to talk to those who do not go out of their way to approach you, or leave behind the bustle of Havana, that you are overwhelmed by people's genuine friendliness. It is as though there are two separate countries – Havana and the nearby tourist resort of Varadero, and the rest of the island. You encounter hard-working people who hold close to their hearts the knowledge of what the revolution has built for them. They see Castro as the administrator and mentor of these benefits, who, whatever mistakes may have been made, has always had the interests of his people at heart.

This is why we found it so rewarding to join the Rock around the Blockade brigade last December. The experience of those two weeks were the most profound and memorable of the six months we spent in Cuba. Every day we grew more assured of

the importance of the revolution, of its logic. We could see the potential of human beings to care about each other and their environment, feel the importance of each person taking responsibility, cooperating in a collective effort. The older people, in particular, still talk with such strength of their revolution and how they kicked the US imperialists out of their country. They have horrific stories to tell of life before the revolution, of poverty and exploitation by the Batista regime, of punishment and fear. These are not merely images from history – they are accounts of the lives of millions in the rest of Latin America.

For there were sights we then saw in Mexico which shocked and outraged us: a man so physically deformed that he crawled along the ground among flea-bitten dogs, begging for money from children who had worked all day to feed their sick mother. Ask the eight-year-old shoe cleaners in Mexico if they go to school and they will snigger at your naivety: even if they were not working all day cleaning the shoes of

middle class Mexicans and tourists how could they pay the school fees? Hospital care is said to be free in Mexico, but lacks even the most basic facilities. Just for access to an x-ray machine they have to go to a private hospital and pay.

It is a mistake to compare the lives of the Cuban people with those in the other Latin American countries we visited. It is easy to feel like a parrot repeating the benefits of Cuba's socialist system: 'everyone in Cuba has free education, free health care, access to home, a ration, special facilities for pregnant women etc'. But in the light of the appalling poverty we saw in other countries, it cannot be emphasised enough.

As the reality of the economic crisis hits home throughout Latin America, the influence of the Cuban example is also increasing. We spoke to people full of admiration for Castro and with a desperate envy for the Cuban people who had escaped the raw brutality of capitalist exploitation. All over Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela we saw hurriedly painted salutes – 'Viva Cuba! Cuba si, yanqui no!'

HELEN
North London

Cuba vive!

I read with interest your articles on Cuba in your last edition of FRFI which I bought at the launch meeting of Preston and Blackburn CSC in Preston Town Hall in September. Members of the RCG from the local university were present and we hope to campaign together in the future to end the US blockade of Cuba.

I would like to take this opportunity of commanding the report *Cuba Viva! Defend Socialism!* written by members of the Rock around the Blockade work brigade which took place in December 1995-January 1996. As I mentioned at our meeting, I thought it was the best insight into the situation in Cuba today and an inspiration to continue the fight for socialism both in Cuba and at home. Well worth £1.95!

FATHER GEOFFREY BOTTOMS
Preston

Labour, a party fit for imperialism

I attended a Cuba Solidarity Campaign event in Sheffield in July where I met a group of RCG members who were holding a stall there. We got talking about Cuba and the situation there, and also about the RCG/FRFI and its activities.

We also discussed the rank hypocrisy of the Labour Party and the role it has played down the years in implementing its imperialist and racist ambitions on the weakest nations of the earth to suit its own selfish interests.

It is clear that the Labour Party is not and never has been a party which gives a damn about oppressed minorities in the world or the working class in Britain. Labour is not a party which represents the concerns of these groups. In reality it is a party dominated by a middle-class bourgeoisie who seek to ally themselves with the forces of global capitalism in the interests of British and Labour Party imperialist and racist aims.

Keep up the good work, comrades.

STEVEN PARKER
Chesterfield

other forms of injustice. The work being done with Rock around the Blockade is inspiring. It is so easy to believe the bullshit being put forward by inadequates who would like us to believe that Cuba is 'Castro's dictatorship' etc, whereas FRFI does an excellent job in reporting facts which dare to speak the truth.

My most recent experiences with Rock around the Blockade, such as fundraising events, meetings and stalls have been a real eye-opener with a massive amount of support being shown from many sections of society. The response to a stall we held during Freshers' Week at Preston University was overwhelming – particularly from students who expressed an interest in setting up a student society in support of Cuba and the brigade. We are hoping to expand this campaign, holding regular meetings and activities to spread awareness of the benefits of socialism as an example to others everywhere. Viva Cuba!

ALLAN HOPE
Preston

Effects of neoliberalism

Keep on fighting! I am Mexican and play in a band. Our songs are non-conformist – we rebel through our lyrics.

Mexico is going through a severe crisis. Society is disintegrating. In particular, the collapse of institutions is leading to a crisis of values and credibility. A large percentage of our population is under 30 but, inevitably, there are few voices raised amongst all the shit and apathy to reach out to causes that are really felt by the mass of the population. Our culture and our identity are being destroyed by neoliberal policies. Egocentric individualism weighs on all sectors of society, and solidarity has become simply a word that is seen as obsolete or representing unworkable values. We need everyone to know that the people of Mexico have been tricked by those who were elected into power: they have betrayed democracy.

FERNANDO
Mexico

The classic campaign t-shirt – high-quality Fruit of the Loom white cotton, red and black design of Che Guevara and 'Viva Cuba' on the front and 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back – is still available for only £7 inc p+p. XL only. 'Rage against the US blockade' Che Guevara badges are 50p.

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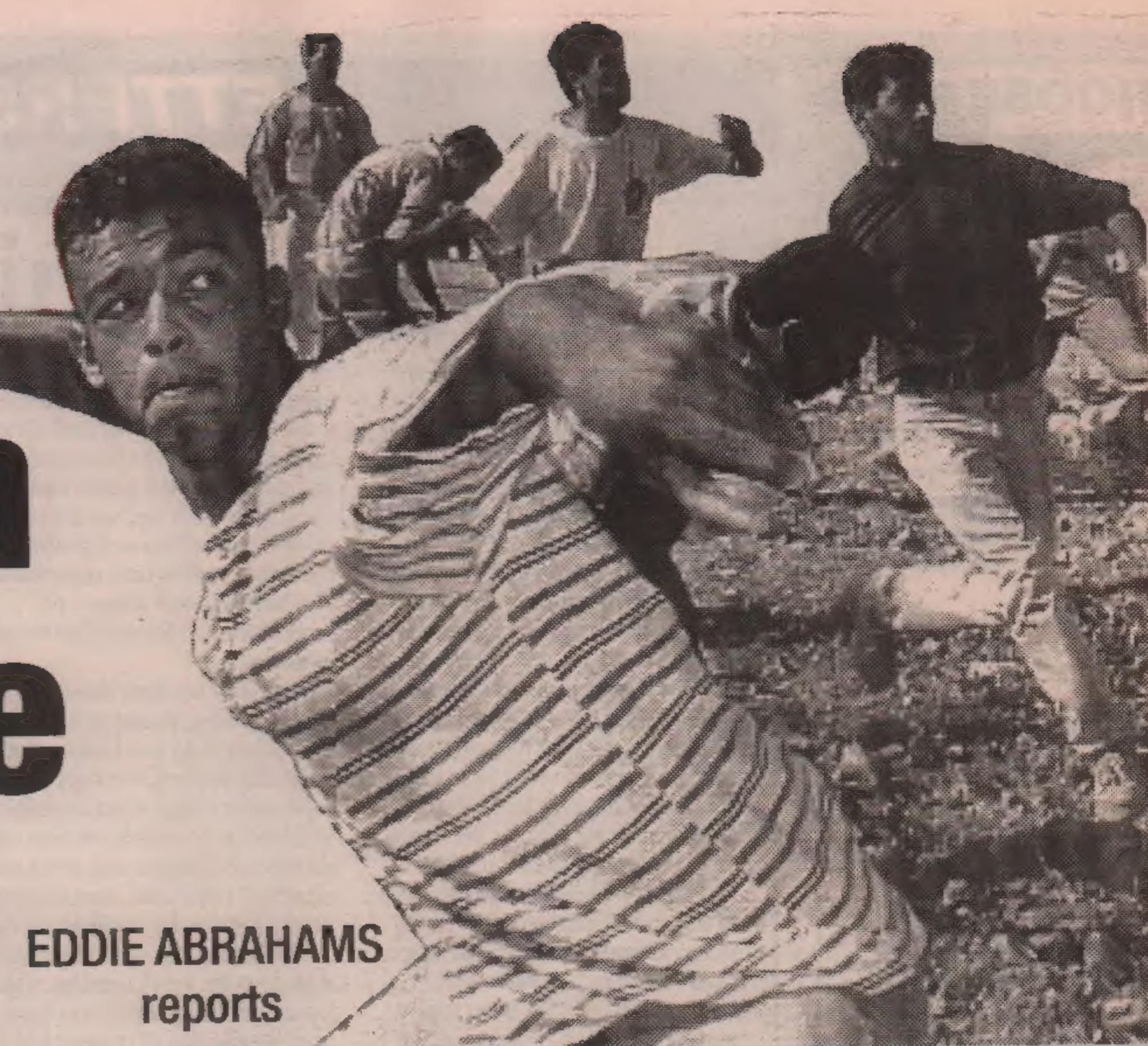
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**FIGHT
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PALESTINE

Popular verdict on the 'peace process'



EDDIE ABRAHAMS
reports

The popular insurrection that swept through the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip in the last week of September was the Palestinian people's verdict on the so-called Middle East Peace process. 'This is not peace. We want an intifada - this time with guns' said an elderly Palestinian quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* on 26 September.

The insurrection was more than a revolt against the 'peace process'. It was living testimony that ordinary people, the poor, the oppressed, are capable of acting independently of their own corrupt ruling elite, the 'Palestinian Administration', and in opposition to the mighty power of an armed state, the racist Israeli colonial-settler state.

Recently Yasser Arafat sought to control popular opposition and bolster his diminishing credibility by calling for a general strike against the Israeli government's refusal to implement certain elements of the Israel/PLO 'peace deal'. However, the current uprising threatens to go well beyond his and the Palestinian Administration's control. The *Financial Times* reports that 'Israeli officials were unsure whether he (Arafat) had full control over Palestinian civilians or armed Palestinian police.' (27 September)

The Palestinian people have had enough of the 'peace process'. It is proving to be a slow but certain genocide against them. Not even the right-wing press in Britain cares to pretend that the peace process has brought any benefits to the Palestinian people. The *Daily Telegraph* writes that 'the early promise of Palestinian autonomy, that it would lead to a Palestinian state, evaporated long ago. For many it was a murky and humiliating compromise... Palestinians' freedom was strictly circumscribed. Despite its talk of peace, the previous Labour government expanded Jewish settlements and repeatedly sealed off the West Bank and Gaza Strip...and impoverished the Palestinians.' (27 September)

The incident that sparked the latest uprising was the opening of an entrance to an ancient Jewish tunnel beneath the Al Aqsa Mosque - a major Islamic shrine. The issue is symbolic of the profound conflict between the colonial character of Zionism and the Palestinian people, centring presently on the struggle for Jerusalem. Under both Labour and Likud governments, both before and after the 'peace accords', Zionist settlements have been expanded in East (Arab) Jerusalem, ringing the Arab areas and cutting them off from their natural West Bank hinterland. Within Arab Jerusalem all Palestinian development is obstructed. Last month Israeli bulldozers demolished the Bur al Laqlaq Centre for the Aged and Handicapped on the grounds that it was built illegally. At the same time the Likud government gave the go-ahead for yet another round of settlement expansion and simultaneously banned Palestinians from using main roads linking Zionist settlements, even though these pass through Palestinian areas. This is ethnic cleansing. As the *Financial Times* stated, 'Israeli governments, whether led by Labour or Netanyahu's Likud, have...used housing and zoning policy, and discrimination over resident permits, to create a Jewish majority in the eastern quarters and make it

impossible for Arab residents to build enough to house their expanding families.' (28 September) As a result, by 1994 Arabs were already a minority in East Jerusalem. The Israeli state's flagrant disregard for Palestinian national and Muslim religious sensitivities over Jerusalem reflects the arrogant imperialist manner in which it is systematically robbing the Palestinian people of their land and means of livelihood behind the cloak of the 'peace process'. The colonisation of Palestine is proceeding at a rapid pace. According to a settler publication *Nekuda*, since the signing of the 'peace accords', the number of settlers in Israeli-occupied Palestine has risen 50 per cent from 105,940 to 152,324. Settlers now have 72 per cent of the land under their control.

Meanwhile unemployment, poverty and suffering become the inexorable fate of hundreds of thousands as Israel chokes the economy of the West Bank and Gaza. It is against these conditions that the Palestinians vented their rage and anger in September. And it is rage and anger directed also against Zionism's international backers. In the face of Zionist murder, the people cried out: 'Where is America? Where is the United Nations? They brought their forces for a few Kuwaiti dogs. But we don't hear their voices.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 September)

The political battle the Palestinian masses will face in the coming period will be difficult. The collaborationist and bourgeois Palestinian Administration, headed by Yassir Arafat, will seek to control and use the mass protests as a lever to extract a few extra concessions for itself from Netanyahu's government. Arafat is already preparing to resume negotiations with Netanyahu. However, the Palestinian people have a tremendous tradition of building popular revolutionary organisations. The re-emergence of organisations of people's power, a feature of the Intifada of 1987-1993, could ensure that Arafat is not able to use the mass movement for his own narrow class ends. It will also, by involving the masses, and particularly women, in political organisation, secure the movement's future against attempts by Hamas to demobilise the movement as they did during

the Intifada. Such organisation will also be an insurance against the Palestinian police - a relatively privileged force set up by Arafat and the Israelis - turning their guns on the people. As the *Daily Telegraph* noted, 'until this week Palestinian security forces were increasingly reviled as authoritarian and lackeys of the Jewish occupiers. By firing back at the Israelis...they were restored overnight as popular heroes.' (27 September). The Palestinian people cannot rely on such forces. The people, however, have their own tradition of popular armed struggle on which they can draw and into which they can integrate all the honest police now fighting the Zionists. In this struggle we cannot be passive onlookers. Imperialist governments will do everything within their means to support Zionism and stifle this uprising. The example of hundreds of thousands of people taking political action against the rich and privileged could be internationally contagious. In a letter, the British, French and German governments state: 'We are sending a joint solemn appeal to make the necessary calming gestures and urge an immediate resumption of negotiations at the highest level.' This is but a call on the Palestinian people to go quietly to their death as a people and a country. The Palestinian people need all the solidarity they can get. We can begin by demanding an end to British, US and other imperialist support for Zionism.

KURDISTAN

Puppets fall out

The September uprising in Palestine was preceded by the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP)/Iraqi Army alliance's capture of Arbil, capital of South Kurdistan, from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) at the end of August and the subsequent US bombing of southern Iraq. The USA demonstrated its determination to retain control over Middle Eastern oil and the southern bourgeois/feudal Kurdish leadership showed their willingness to serve as instruments in the hands of the contending regional and imperial powers in return for selfish material gains. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

The 'safe haven' in northern Iraq/ South Kurdistan was only ever conceived by the USA, Britain and France as a holding operation to tide them over until the Iraqi state was sufficiently pliant; no permanent independent political status for the Kurds was envisaged. When Saddam Hussein's troops advanced on Arbil in August, the US government felt compelled to react to make clear its determination to control the outcome of the holding operation. Through the bombing Clinton also hoped to bolster his election chances.

However the US operation has unravelled the Gulf War alliance, as only Kuwait of the Gulf states backed the US raids. Turkey refused to allow US aircraft based there to be used to bomb Iraq. France opposed the US

attack and only the British government and the Labour Party were fulsome in their support. However, whatever the differences between the regional and imperial powers, they remain united in their opposition to the emergence of a Kurdish nation and state. Such a state would signal the collapse of geopolitical arrangements that have served the Western powers well since the First World War. It would challenge the ruling groups in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria whose states were formed at the expense of the Kurds.

Neither the KDP nor the PUK are

with the Turkish army to attack the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), a genuine representative of the Kurdish people. The PKK is based not on a selfish clique but on urban and rural workers, mainly from northwest Kurdistan/southeast Turkey who make up the majority of its guerrillas. Because the PKK stands for the interests of the poor and the masses it stands for the unity of Kurdistan. Hence, every machination by the US and British governments in the region will include designs to weaken the PKK.

The US bombing of Iraq and the military clashes in southern Kurdistan have once again shown that the destiny of the Kurdish people cannot be entrusted to 'humanitarian' imperialism and its safe havens. The British government, which proposed these safe havens, showed complete indifference to the prospect of hundreds of thousands of Kurds freezing and starving in the arid mountainous camps. Indeed, the British government has demonstrated its attitude to the Kurdish people by imprisoning and persecuting the chief European representative of the PKK - Kani Yilmaz.

